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# ALMETTA *of* GABRIEL'S RUN



LOUISE S. MURDOCH



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She greeted him  
with a bright smile and a  
“Howdy, Uncle Gabriel.”

# ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

By  
LOUISE S. MURDOCH

Illustrated



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**ALMETTA  
OF GABRIEL'S RUN**



# ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

## I

### GABRIEL'S RUN

**M**ANY years before Almetta's day her forebear, Gabriel Recording Angel, had come from "Carliny" through the Gap. He came in quest of deer and bear and wild honey. Finding them in abundance, with wild turkey and other game, he settled on a large creek in the wilds of the Cumberland Mountains.

On his return from his second trip back to the settlement with pelts and honey, he brought a young wife to his half-camp in the deep woods of Kentucky. This "camp" was a rude shelter of three log walls and a split board roof without either chimney or flue. The ash-cakes were baked and the venison spitted at a fire built upon the ground just outside the open end of the camp. The eating was good and the arrangement pleasant when the smoke went straight up or blew away from the camp.

Tradition said that the young wife was fair and brave and strong. All of which was well, for it was indeed a wild and lonely place in which the Angels had set up their household gods,

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with wildcats and poisonous snakes abounding, and an occasional lurking Indian.

Little flaxen-haired, rosy-cheeked Flora Angel needed all the strength of her sound, well-knit body and all the cheerfulness and courage with which she was blessed. It was their second and last year in the half-camp, and "Dogwood winter" was chilling the heart of May, when twins were born to Rec and Flora, a dark little boy and a fair little girl: and their father, Gabriel Recording, opened the Bible at random to find their names.

Flora's brother and his wife, Dan and Susan Ingold, had come out from Carolina to be their neighbors; and Flora confided to Susan that if it were not for its being such a scary place to live in anyhow she would not give the children Bible names, in spite of all the Angels in "Kaintuck" and "Carliny"; "But Rec's folks," she said, "had allers follered it and it seemed a bad time to change the custom." Flora meant to be pious for the good luck of the children, and so they were named Nathan and Talithy Cumi, as many other Angels have been since.

Flora and Susan rocked them in half a hollow log, dosed them with strong herb tea, and minded the bears and "catamounts" out of the open end of the shack, while their husbands put in the small crops of corn and tobacco and cut and hewed the logs for their two new cabins. The Ingolds' was to be at the mouth of the next creek below. Each house was to have one room with four complete log walls, a chimney with a great open fireplace, and a strong batten door.

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It was the first winter in the new cabin that a huge brown bear came between Rec and his rifle in one of his rare unguarded moments and gave him the chase of his life. Indeed he was only saved by the timely intervention of his wife, who checked the beast upon the step-block at the door with a dash of boiling suds and slammed and barred the door during the recoil of the animal; and so the creek came to be known as "Gabriel's Run" among the settlers who were coming every year in great numbers.

But all this was more than a hundred years ago, and nobody ever thought now of either coming from or going to "Carliny through the Gap," or any other way, and those times were spoken of as "old" and "quare."

A stranger from the settlements might have ridden the length of Gabriel's Run after the more than hundred years and still called it wild and sparsely settled, but there were homes and fields in the valley of Gabriel, and plenty of folk who lived and worked, or idled, in them, from the head, where Bee-Tree Branch, and the Still-House Fork met in a deep cool gorge at the foot of Indian Head Hill, down to the mouth, where it twisted and turned, making a double S before cutting through the high banks into the river.

There were Angels and Ingolds living there and close about, descendants of old Rec and old Dan, who scarcely counted themselves akin.

It was a beautiful valley. The clearings on the steep mountain sides were in patches, and much of the forest almost virgin, though many a giant tree had gone the way of the river.

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Only the great rotting stumps of the black walnuts were left to tell of their former glory, and of the periods when our grandfathers finished the interiors of their brick houses with this rich wood, duly covering it with white enamel paint; and our fathers furnished them with ugly top-heavy furniture of the same; relegating cherry and even mahogany and rosewood four-poster beds and chests of drawers and drop-leaved tables, to attics, back halls and servants' quarters.

Almost anything will grow on the hillsides and in the valleys of the Kentucky mountains, and there was always something blooming, from the tulip poplars, bearing their yellow cups a hundred feet in air on the tops of high ridges, to the lovely pink moccasin flowers blooming at their feet. There were medicinal herbs and barks in endless variety, wild alum to draw with, slippery elm to soothe, Indian hemp for rheumatism, mullein (to be sweetened with honey) for coughs, percoon, May apple, yellow root, seven barks, all for the ailments of the white man's body, and ginseng (called sang) to be dug and sold at fabulous prices—sometimes five or seven dollars a pound—to be shipped abroad to relieve the minds of the Chinese. “Sanging” was remunerative and delightful work. Nothing was pleasanter than to take a hoe and roam the woods, looking for the interesting plants whose leaves were different every year, being, “two-prong,” “three-prong,” “four-prong,” etc., according to age, and any one of which could be easily mistaken

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for the rattleweed or some other plant. Many a dress of "brought on" cloth, or gay ribbon was traded for at the little stores with small "pokes" of ginseng, yellow root or May apple.

'Twas easy to live in these productive valleys, where so many things grew themselves, with honey in the hollows of the forest trees for sweetening; and a crop of corn could be planted and "laid by" in three months. And so, with their sheep browsing on the hills, and hogs living on the mast, the Angels and Ingolds and other families which had drifted in, took out a few rafts of logs on the river tides and found little to worry about and nothing to blame God for. If they were not particularly religious their prejudice was in favor of being so, and blasphemy against the "Old Man" was the most condemned sin of the section. Their young people, having few diversions, married in their early teens, asking no hard questions of life as to how they would live and raise large families. A kindly Providence took most of the physical weaklings to Himself in their early years.

Gabriel's Run itself was usually a small and peaceful stream, its waters limpid, with holes where black bass lurked and shoals where schools of minnows played.

In the mountains more real interest follows the streams than any other thing, and a flux of waters will rouse the people as neither birth nor death, nor even a killing.

In dog-days the running water was a tiny thread between the "retches" (reaches) and deep holes and only the wide expanse of dry

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bed and the water marks along the banks, perhaps a dried corn stalk or a bunch of brown leaves caught in the branches of some overhanging tree, gave hint of the water's freakish ways or the height to which it sometimes went.

In time of tide—and a tide might come at any time of the year—Gabriel's Run came down, a tawny, twisting, roaring flood, bearing on its mottled bosom anything which grew or had been left upon its banks. Logs, tides, driftwood, limbs of trees, fence rails and much rich earth were its usual burden, diversified by green mementoes of the growing crops, utensils from the farms or homes, a whole tree uprooted and borne along, or a dead animal drowned in the sudden freshet. These torrents often came in a few minutes, and human beings had to scamper for their lives. A woman's washing kettle, half full of clothes, with the "poking stick" borne aloft like a masthead, had come bobbing merrily along one day on the bosom of the rising tide, and was salvaged by a neighbor further down, who stoutly declared that it was still boiling when brought to shore. The creek was boiling at any rate, and flinging yellow suds of foam.

Once a house had been lifted from the left bank and set down half a mile below, on the right bank, nicely turned around to face the creek, and the owner was much pleased with the change, regretting that the barn and the crib had not come along also.

The official county road followed the creek and was really in its rough bed much of the way,

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though there were occasional smooth stretches along its banks or over a knoll.

It was in the late eighties of the last century that a gray old man riding up the creek and a fair young girl walking down met on a sandy stretch of road beside a pair of low bars. They were both Angels, both descendants of Gabriel Recording, but they were more conscious of the tie of affection between themselves than of blood relationship.

The girl was little and blonde and rosy, like Flora Angel, but not so sturdily built—in fact she was slender and light. A stout pair of shoes, tied together by the strings, was slung across her left shoulder, a bundle done up in a large blue handkerchief hung from her left elbow, and in her left hand she carried a small bunch of “blossoms” and tender sweet “fyerns” (ferns). In the right hand she carried a long limber switch, and was flicking up the dust with it in occasional little spurts as she came slowly and dreamily along.

When she saw the old man ambling up on his fat, flea-bitten white horse, she perched upon the bars at the side of the road and waited for him. As he rode up alongside and drew rein, she greeted him with a bright smile and a “Howdy, Uncle Gabriel.”

“Why, howdy, Almetty,” he said, with an answering smile; “you air a sight fur sore eyes.”

“Your eyes don’t look sore, Uncle Gabriel,” she said.

The old man chuckled, and his black eyes

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twinkled under the bushy gray eyebrows. He saw the bundle hanging from her elbow, but said nothing about it.

"How is all at Ed'ard's?" he asked.

"Ay, they are all stirring."

"How is that little boy of Alifar's? I hyeard one of her young'ns was aildin."

"It's Jimmy," said the girl, with a look of tender concern. "Poor little fellow, he's mighty weak an' spindlin'; he's fell away a sight and don't eat as much as a bird."

"Huh," said the old man sympathetically, "an' what air they a doin' fur him?"

"Well, Granny has been dostin' him with every kind of tea that could be made, and Alifair has had the charm doctor, but he ain't mended none. Granny Ann 'lows he needs doctor medicine, she reckons, but Ed'ard won't send fur none."

Uncle Gabriel nodded his head in silence, and the girl continued, "All of Alifair's young'ns air sorty pale and frothy looking an' don't sleep good. I 'lowed they needed more room in bed, an' I'm letting them have what I took." She spoke quietly and earnestly and the old man did not doubt her, yet he asked,

"Wan't you farin' all right at Ann's?"

"Shore, I wuz farin' fine," she said, "but everybody has been scrouged since Alifair and the young'ns come home, and they had the best rights."

"Shore, shore, Alifair has had a heap of trouble sence her man got killed; and where air you started now, with your budget?"

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"Well, I ain't started no particular place," she said. "Granny Ann made me promise not to go fur, and to come back 'gainst cold weather. She 'lowed they had the most room at Johnnie's, and the most to eat at Red Ike's, and she knowed I could get to stay at one or the t'other, but hit's been so pretty along the creek this mornin' that I just come on by both places without stoppin'."

The old man was turning things over in his own mind and only said "Uhuh!"

"I jest been sa'nterin' along," she said, first smelling and then kissing the bunch of blossoms in her hand, "pluckin' the fyerns and blossoms; sorty hatin' to take up anywheres, and sorty wishin' I wuz a diadapper."

"Wishin' you was a diadapper?" said the old man, astonished.

"Yes," she said with a merry twinkle; "they's the most independent critters, they is, with more kinds o' nater."

"Yes," said the old man slowly, "I reckon they is plum independent."

"Yes," said Almetta, "I seen one a while ago; he was a-swimmin' along on top of the water like a duck, and when he seen me he dove, and swum to the end uv the retch like a fish, and then he riz and whirled off to the woods like a pat'tage. One pears to suit him pime blank as well as 'nother. Ef I wuz like that, an' could breathe in air er water, you wouldn't ketch me herdin' with nobody."

"Well, they must be somethin' said in favor of bein' a diadapper," said Uncle Gabriel,

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smiling, "but they is sorty quare turned, and mighty unsociable. I'd 'low you'd druther be one of these here little wrennie birds, what sets on high places close to somebody's house and sings so beautiful."

The word "beautiful" is not used commonly in the rural districts of the mountains, and when a special loveliness calls for it each syllable is given full accent, and it is more meaningful than we have it in the towns. Uncle Gabriel's description of the wren caught the girl at once and she exclaimed, "Shore, I'd druther be a wrenny bird."

"I knowed in reason it'd suit you a heap the best."

"Well, I can sing funeral hymns, like Philip Gayheart, or song ballets like Mary Betts, and I could sing ditties, like Hence Duke, but Granny Ann won't let me."

"No, you ain't no business singin' ditties," said the old man.

"How would you like to go down to the mouth of the creek and stay with Orleny Ingold?" he asked, giving a practical turn to the conversation.

"I might like hit, all right, but ain't hit a mighty fur piece?" she asked.

"Ay, it's a right smart step, but you just cross the bars here and go into Peter's and stay with Polly till I come back down by this arternoon, and I'll take you right to Orleny's myself. Hit's pretty nigh noon now," he added, squinting at the sun.

"All right," she said; "I reckon Granny

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Ann wouldn't care. I just 'lowed when I seed you comin' that I'd set right here on these bars and wait for counsel;" and then she added quietly, "Hit ain't the fust time you have lifted me out of the road, Uncle Gabriel."

As the old man was about to ride off she asked—"How is Sid, Uncle Gabe?"

"Why, they don't 'pear to be nothin' the matter with Sid," he replied. "He's very hearty and minds well enough, I reckon. You'll get to see him right along down to Orlenys."

Almetta sat on the bars a long time after the old man rode on, stirring the dust occasionally with her switch, enjoying the loveliness of the day, but thinking most of the time long ago when Uncle Gabriel had found her a home after her mother's death, and had himself taken her brother Sidney. After a while she slipped down on the other side of the bars and went in to dinner with Peter's Polly, whose house was just out of sight around a spur of the foothills.

She and Polly and the children were at the bars when Gabriel returned in the afternoon. Polly declared that she would be "plum glad to keep Almetty" herself, and urged Gabriel to "light and take a night" with them, but he said he must be gittin' back and had sorty promised Orlenys to find her a good girl, and he reckoned Almetty had better go on.

Gabriel lived on the next creek above Gabriel's Run, and it would take steady riding to get him home before dark. Almetta mounted behind and they rode off down the creek, a grizzled old man and a fair little girl, in perfect

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contrast outwardly, but with hearts as much alike as two white blossoms on one stem.

Almetta had many questions to ask about Sid, whom she had not seen for a year and she and Gabriel chatted or rode in agreeable silence for a couple of hours, and the shadows were beginning to lengthen when they drew rein in front of Jimmy Ingold's double log-house, which stood on the identical spot where old Gabriel Recording Angel's half-camp had stood so long ago.

Gabriel called Orlena down to the fence, and after a stiff argument as to whether he should light and take a night with them, he asked Orlena,

"Did I hear you was wantin' a smart gal to help do the things?"

"Well, yes," she said, "I am. I hain't no regular help in the house since Suze married."

"Well, I hyeard you hadn't, and I have been sorty lookin' around fur a gal fur ye."

"I've been sorty waitin' fur Bob's Lize," said Orlena, "but Jimmy hyeard a Sunday that her and Clint had run off and got married."

"They did," said Gabriel; "they shore run off; I hope they got married."

"Wuz you thinkin' you could find me a smart little gal?" the woman asked, as her eyes rested kindly on Almetta.

"I 'lowed I mought," he said.

"I reckon she wouldn't be fur to go to find?" suggested Orlena.

"Not fur," said the old man.

Almetta had pushed her sunbonnet back and

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was smiling in a friendly way at the discussion.

"Well, now, Uncle Gabriel, ain't she a very small pattern?" questioned Orlena.

"Yes, she is full small, but I allow being willing and smart adds to a body's size."

"Hit does, hit does," said Orlena. "An' whose gal is she? She's a pyore Angel I can see that without bein' told."

"Yes, she's a Angel, and a good bit of kin to you, I reckon. She's lame Nat's gal, and both her parents is dead."

"Why, shore, I know about her; she's been stayin' up at Ed'ard's, ain't she?"

"Yes, she's been at Ed'ard's, and a gettin' along moughty well. Ann didn't want her to leave, but Alifair has had to take and go back home with her young'ns, and this little gal is needin' another home."

"And what do they call you, honey?" Orlena asked the girl.

"Almetta."

"And how old mought you be?"

"I've been turned into fifteen since the fifteenth of April."

"Well, Gabriel," said Orlena, "ef you will be to go on yourself, ride up to the stileblock and let this little gal down."

"I'll jest git off here," said the girl, and had sprung lightly to the fence and was standing in the grass by Orlena's side before Uncle Gabriel had time to cluck to the old white horse.

"Why, she is pime blank like a gray squirrel," said the woman. "I hate to see you leavin', Gabriel, and hit time to raise the sup-

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per smoke. You ain't et a mess with us in allers."

"I'll be down and take a mess with you before long. You come and see us, Orleny."

"I will; you come down."

"Well, you come. Be a good gal, Almetty, and Sid and me will be down before long to see how you are farin'."

"Well," said the girl soberly, as he rode off, and she turned toward the house with Orlena.

There was nobody about but herself and the woman, and it semed very still and strange. She sat down upon the porch and answered very readily Orlena's questions about Granny Ann and Alifair and her children, and various folk up the creek. She did promptly the errands to the woodpile and spring, in preparation for the evening meal, but the smile did not come back to her face until she went with Orlena to mind the "gap" as the older woman milked. The strong hungry little calf, with one white foot, kept her busy and dispelled, with its capers, the loneliness which threatened her.

"You ficety little 'Whitefoot,'" she exclaimed, holding it around the neck.

"Well, I reckon that settles it," said Orlena. "Gran 'lowed we'd have to name it 'Whitefoot.'"

"Is Gran your boy?"

"No, he is the boy that lives here and works. I ain't got nary single boy."

"Have you a single gal?"

"No, my young'ns is all married and gone—all that lived to be growed up."

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Almetta did not speak for a while, and then asked, "Air you and Jimmy and Gran and me all that stays here?"

"Yes, we are all that lives here regularly."

"Hit 'pears like a pretty small family for such a big house."

"Yes, but betwixt river-men and travelling men, and so on, we have a good many passengers stoppin'—somebody ever' week or such a matter, and hit ain't no ways lonesome, arter a body gits used to the place."

Supper was about ready when Jimmy and Gran came in from work. Almetta had rung the farm bell and was coming up on the porch with a bucket of water for the washing bench as they came up. They all said "Howdy." Almetta set her bucket on the bench and went on to the kitchen. Jimmy made his toilet and went into the "upper house." Gran had soused his face and head in the pan and dried them on the towel when Almetta returned.

"Gran," she said; "Orlena says did you tell Teacy Price to come down here in the morning and help to plant the taters?"

"Yes," said Gran, carefully parting his hair in front of the little mirror with a small comb he had taken from his pocket. "Teacy said tell her she'd be here shore."

The woman and the girl waited upon "the men" at supper, and after washing and putting away the vessels and dishes sat for a while on the porch with them, while first Jimmy and then Orlena took a short smoke from the same pipe. Orlena did not smoke enough to keep a

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pipe of her own, but occasionally enjoyed the use of her husband's in leisure moments.

Jimmy called attention to the little "dry" new moon, a tiny silvery quartercircle lying on its back, just above the western hills.

"What makes hit dry, Jimmy?" asked Almetta.

"Why, hit's layin' level with both horns straight up, and hit can't spill the water that-er-way," said Jimmy, in all seriousness.

"Well, that's larned me something," said the girl. "I've allers heard of 'dry' moons and 'wet' moons, but I never knowed afore what made 'em."

"Yes, we'll have a dry month for the plowin' and plantin' apter than not," said Jimmy.

"And then ag'in," said Gran dryly, "we may have a cloud-bust"; and added that his pap allers laid his good luck to his own smartness and his ill luck to the moon.

"Well," said Orlena, "she" (the moon) "don't allers hit, but I'd a leetle druther have her fur me than ag'in me. I ain't found no better time to plant taters than a dry dark moon in April, though some contends fur March."

The nights were cool and they did not linger on the porch. Gran slept in the loft, and when Orlena showed Almetta the big feather bed in the other corner of the room from hers and Jimmy's the girl looked at it almost ruefully.

The ash bedsteads had been well made, by hand, years ago, and time and use had brought the wood to a beautiful satin finish. The corner posts, standing about four feet, were

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square and stout, each surmounted with a well-turned round ball. The head and foot boards were plain, and each bed had a feather tick over a straw tick, and over the covers was drawn smoothly a gay calico quilt with a great loaming star radiating from its middle.

"Hit peers like a pity to tear hit up fur jest one little gal. I've been a-sleepin' on a pallet with three of Alifair's young'ns, and I may not rest well in such a fine bed all to myself," she demurely said, as she slipped out of her outside dress and crept under the quilts in the dress she was wearing for an "undercoat." "Lize can have my place on the pallet to-night, and Jimmy will have more room in his bed. Pore little fellow, I wonder how he is by now?"

"I 'low he is sound asleep," said Orlena.

"Yes, I reckon he is. I hope he is a whole lot better by now. Hit 'pears like hit's been better'n a month sence I seen any uv them." She lay quietly for a long time and Orlena had fallen asleep when she finally observed,

"I reckon I told Granny Ann a little story this mornin', but I didn't aim to. I told her I wouldn't go fur, and here I am clear down to the mouth uv Gabriel, in a plum strange place. I reckon hit's the nicest place on the river, hain't Orlena's?" She took the woman's silence for modesty, and asked, "Ain't hit quare how fur a person can go in a day?"

The only answer was a purring breath, and she nestled down in the feathers with the final observation, "Huh, that old woman's asleep!"

Almetta belonged to that large class of or-

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phaned or unfortunate children who are accustomed to changing homes at irregular intervals, according to their own fancy or the convenience of others. She slept soundly in Orlena's big bed, under the great "loaming star," and dreamed that she and Peter's Polly had come one hundred miles in a white boat and that Polly had suddenly turned to a diadapper and flown back while she had stayed to sing.

The next morning after the housework was done she took the brush-broom, of her own accord, and when Teacy Price came to help with the potatoes she found her sweeping the spot of bare ground in front of the porch until it fairly shone, and singing a song the burden of which was: "Mothers have a home, sweet home, Fathers have a home, sweet home, Sisters have a home, sweet home" and so on through the family, the refrain of which was: "I want to join the angels in that home, sweet home."

## II

### GRAN'S SCHOOLING

**J**IMMY'S prophecy of fair weather was fulfilled, and between getting ready for the crop and making the garden it was a busy season for all.

Jimmy and Gran and the tenant, Bill Price, ploughed the steep hillsides and the narrow strip of bottom-land and the banks almost to the water's edge, where scrubby little water-birches had been set out to hold the earth in time of high water.

"The crop" in the mountains means corn, and to have one is an invariable and essential thing; the making of it is gone about quite in the spirit of a festival by whole families.

When the brown earth is warm and soft under foot, after the winter freezes, and the air is mellow with warmth and light and blossom sweetness, the women and children come teeming from their dark little homes in the valleys, like children let loose from school, to make a play of work on the hillsides and by the water-courses.

The trees of the forest, for the most part, are still bare of foliage, save where an elm-tree shows a greening top among them; and the smoke from the burning brushheaps in the

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clearings settles over their brown tops, a murky blue. The purple judas-trees bloom at the end of Lent with dogwood, and the white and red fringes of the sarvis berry and sugar maple make gay the fence-rows where the cardinals blithely call—"Sugar sweet!" "Sugar sweet!"

The grain is planted when the "oak-leaves are as big as squirrel paws" (and much resemble them), and corn-hoeing begins when the young plants are a few inches high and show plainly in green rows across the fields. The hoeing is more than all a family affair, and it is no unusual sight to see from six to eight members of a family each taking a row around a steep hillside, with the fastest hand leading, while the baby lies on a quilt under some convenient shade and the other small children play about. Small wonder that so much of the work is not well done, and the yield too often small.

Making the crop is not all a spring festival, however. The whole must be gone over at least three times with the hoes, chopping out grass and weeds and hilling the earth up to the plants. It is delving hard work for women and children before the last plantings are "laid by" to grow without further cultivating in the intense heat of middle July.

Orlena Ingold, like many of the better-off women, had not gone to the fields to work since middle life, except to plant beans and squashes to run over and among the corn, or occasionally for the pure love of it; but she was accustomed to make her own garden, with little masculine assistance, after the ploughing. (It was

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a poor stick of a woman who did not.) She and Almetta planted onions and potatoes and beans of many varieties—bunch-beans, stick-beans, corn-field beans, soup-beans, hickory-sticks, and the great fat “fall beans,” in exact succession, with cabbage, beets, and mustard for salad.

Gran showed a disposition to help the women between field work, declaring that if Almetta could work in the field he could work in the garden.

One May morning when the first hoeing of the corn was over and the second not quite ready to begin, Jimmy Ingold remarked to Gran that he could make up the sweet potato hills “if he wanted to,” an expression in general use for “if you please.”

Gran, whose full name was Granville, was a well-set-up young fellow of nineteen, not quite six feet in height, but rather above the average, strongly built and sure and quick in his movements. He was dark and good looking, with hair not quite black, and eyes which, though generally taken for black, were greenish gray and somber in repose, but with gifts of kindling in laughter or anger (the latter not often seen). He had a quiet self-respecting manner, with fine courtesy to all, and Orlena described him as being “mighty civil turned” but “independent ef pranked with.” There had never been a better worker on the place, and Jimmy, easily guessing his independence, showed him a man's consideration and received fine service in return. He was just finishing his breakfast when Jimmy suggested the potato hills.

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

"All right," he answered, and as he rose and pushed his chair under the table he said to Almetta, who was just sitting down to her breakfast, "I reckon you'll help, won't you, Almetty? You and me can make 'em up in a day."

"Yes, I'm a good little hand to make tater-hills," she said complacently. "You take along that little light goose-neck hoe for me, Gran, and I'll be down arter I do the things."

"Well, then," said Orlena; "I'll plant some beans in the corn right above the potato patch."

The patch was to be in the lower end of the nearest corn-field, in a bend of the creek, where the ground was soft and sandy.

Gran had made a dozen hills, carrying two rows along together, when Almetta arrived. She took one of the rows and worked along by his side for some time, keeping up by doing her work much less well. He made no comment on this, but occasionally reached across, drawing more dirt up to one of her hills, making it more shapely—his own were perfect little mountain-peaks of finely chopped earth. After a while she abruptly returned to the shade of the willows and perched upon the fence.

Gran carried the two rows along for a long time in silence, but when she seemed to be resting over long and the work was carrying him quite away from her, he called out: "Almetty, I want you to come f'm under the shade uv them willers and he'p me make these tater-hills."

"These willers ain't castin' no shade to hurt nothin'," she responded; "an you don't need no help nohow, Gran." But she slipped down

## GRAN'S SCHOOLING

from the fence and came to his side, saying, "You make the prettiest sweet tater-hills I ever seen."

"Pretty don't spell nothin' ef they hain't saft inside where the growin's got to be done," he said, as he drew the sandy earth deftly to the top of the hill and shaped it off with an artistic flirt of the hoe. "An' how you calculate taters is goin' to grow in all them hard clods you've got kivered up in them hills of your'n is more'n I can see. I want you to make 'em right ef ye goin' to make 'em with me."

"'Tain't what ye want hurts ye," said Almetta, "it's what ye git; an' I ain't aimin' to make no great amount uv tater-hills with ye no-how. Who did ye say larned ye to make sich good uns?"

"I never said," replied Gran dryly. "But ef ye must know, the old man larned me."

"Who? Yer pap?"

"Shore."

"Did he make good uns?"

"I never seed him make none. He was a whole lot like Jimmy; he didn't consider gard'nin' man's work."

"Well, then, how did he larn ye?"

"Well, he just told me to make 'em right."

"Air ye goin' to quit makin' 'em when ye git as big as yer pap?"

"I'm as big now as my pap was," he said; "I'm as high as he wuz; course I ain't as heavy; but I hain't a-goin' to quit makin' tater-hills—at times when hit's my place," he added after a pause. "I been to school some and larned a

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

whole lot that pap never knowed, ef he wuz jist nacherly smart. The fashion in idys is changin' some."

"I hain't noticed no great change 'round here," said the girl.

"Naw, the fashions hain't rech here yit. There's Orleney now over there in the field plantin' beans in the corn, an' Jimmy settin' at home in the shade whittlin' a piece uv poplar, apt as not, or rid off somers tradin'. When I marries, I'm goin' ter help my woman with the gyarden an' a heap o' things."

"Hit ain't the style to marry tell ye gits a chanct," said Almetta.

"Well, I dunno 'bout that; I've seed some ready married that hadn't never had no good chanct; and some willin' that ain't yet had no good chanct."

Almetta laughed good-naturedly, picked up her hoe and made two hills without speaking, breaking the clods carefully and frankly imitating the work of the boy.

"Now," he said, "Almetty, you an' that little goose-neck hoe ain't ekal to full work. You jest skip every other space; I'll make three to your one and you make hit good and saft and full size, and then the taters'll grow a sight better."

The arrangement proved satisfactory.

"Did yer daddy ever give yer a whoopin', Gran?" the girl asked in a pause of the work.

"Naw, he never give me nothin' ye'd call a whoopin'; but he give me a pyore skinnin' onct."

## GRAN'S SCHOOLING

“What did he skin ye fer?”

“Well, hit mout er bin fer my hide f'm the amount he tuck off'n my back.”

“Well,” said the girl, “you must er bin up to some turrible meanness; I allow you sassed him.”

“Naw, I nuver sassed him nuther. I never knowed what he whooped me fur; but I drewed an idy,” he said wisely. The girl scented a story, and pausing with uplifted hoe she asked interestedly, “What idy did ye draw?”

Seeing that her good-natured banter had given place to sympathetic interest, Gran began the story with a reminiscent air as if the incident had occurred a man's lifetime in the past. They both unconsciously stopped hoeing, and Orlena, who was just out of earshot, but in plain sight, smiled to herself and wondered what they were talking about as she saw them standing so long between the potato hills, leaning on their hoes.

“Well,” he said, “I wuz just a little chunk of a boy, an' we wuz livin' up on Bear Cave, where we allers lived. We had a world uv fine land layin' up between the main head dreens uv the branch. Some uv the coves wuz as rich as they ever wuz, but others wuz considerable wore out with corn, and most uv the dreens was perfect dry in summer; but they wuz one holler that trickled a right smart all the time. They wuz deep crevices in hit, an' some uv'm had been said to be bottomless, but they wan't in reason, though animals had got lost in that holler an' bin mighty hard to find. Hit wuz right on the

## *ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN*

edge uv our bound'ry an' a moughty hard place to keep the fence up in. In fact, it were moughty nigh onpossible to keep hit up in the main head uv the holler, an' old man Sizemore's property wuz allers breakin' in on us, and pap an' him had come in a pea uv havin' a fray over hit a time or two. They had been a world uv fine timber left in hit, oaks and chestnuts an' beech, an' ole man Sizemore's hogs, that wuz turned out on the mast, wuz allers a-rootin' through.

"Well, that spring, the old man took a notion to plant in a patch uv new ground—right over ag'in' that holler. He took two uv the big boys an' went an' fixed that line uv fence to his satisfaction, an' put three or four uv us young'ns to burnin' brash-heaps an' grubbin' the field. Well, we got the field cleared an' planted atter so long a time, an' one mornin' just as the corn wuz sproutin' good, pap went up to the field, and there wuz two uv Sizemore's shoats rootin' up the young corn. Well, he found the hole where one uv the boys had nailed a slat to a pawpaw saplin', an' the wood bein' saft, the shoats had pushed the slats off an' come through. Well, he driv 'em out an' fixed up the fence good and strong. Next mornin' he stepped out ag'in, an' he found the very same two spotted shoats rootin' up the corn. He was moughty mad, but he never said nothin'.

"Well, gentlemen, jest pime blank five mornin's hand runnin' he found the same two hogs in the field an' a new hole ever' time. They wuz cute uns!

## GRAN'S SCHOOLING

“The fift mornin’ he nuver driv ’em out nor let on to nobody. He jest stepped back into the house and tuck down the gun and handed her to me an’ says, ‘Son, go run them hogs up the holler.’ That wuz ever’ word he said.

“Well, I wa’n’t nothin’ but a little chap, an’ I jest run the hogs a little way up the holler, behind the ivy bushes where the fyerns wuz high an’ thick, an’ shot ’em, an’ come back to the house an’ put the gun over the fireboard where she belonged. Mam an’ the least ones wuz battlin’ clost at the wash place an’ pap had got on the mare an’ rid off, so I wuz the only one that pintedly knowed who killed the hogs; an’ I never let on.

“Well, hit want many mornin’s before we could see old man Sizemore ramikin’ around in that holler, apparently lookin’ fer something. Me an’ my little sister wuz mindin’ ground-squirrels out uv the corn an’ we seed him goin’ up. He stayed a long time in the main head on’ arter while he came on back down, close by our fence. I wuz moughty busy throwin’ clods at the ground-squirrels, but I could see him, an’ the nigher he come to them ivies, the weaker I felt an’ the stronger I throwed. He come right on down by ’em and stopped what you might call a minute, or not so long, but I knowed in reason th’ old fox had seed the shoats. He come on down further an’ leant acrost the fence an’ axed me wuz the ground-squirrels pretty bad, an’ I ’lowed they wuz. Then he ’lowed the corn wuz coming up moughty pretty, an’ I ’lowed hit shore wuz.

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“Atter a while he said he’s been looking for a couple uv shoats that hadn’t come up fer a few days, but he reckoned they wuz in the calumus holler on t’other side. I said ‘they mought be’ an’ went on, but I knowed in reason he never thought them shoats wuz in the Calumus Holler.

“Shore ’nough, next day Jake Singleton, the depity, wuz there with a warrant uv arrest fer pap. The old man never denied a thing, jest went on to town an’ give bond to ’pear at the next term uv court, an’ come home. In a day or two Jake wuz back and subpoenaed all the family as witnesses, but mam and us three least uns, an’ then everybody lit into hoein’ corn an’ waitin’ fur court. Pap never had been convicted uv nothin’. He tole mam an’ the young’ns that the less folks said about what they knowed nothin’ uv, the better.

“Well, one way an’ another the case was put off till fall, an’ two or three days before the trial Pap ast me ef I didn’t want to go over on Roarin’ Fork to my granny’s an’ go to school. Course I wuz keen to go, an’ mam wuz willin’, hit bein’ her mammy’s.

“Well, pap started me out next mornin’ an’ I stayed all fall an’ larned a sight. Hit wore a sight to hear the teacher talk an’ tell the young’ns how to act. She didn’t ’low ’em to handle no kind uv bad talk, ner fight, an’ she taught ’em a heap uv manners. She made the boys stand back fer the gals, an’ two er three uv the big boys stopped on account uv hit.

“I never seed nobody frum home that whole fall. But I could hear tell that the old man

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had come cl'ar at the trial, an' that folks wuz sayin' that they would shore 'a' convicted him ef I had 'a' be'n there to 'a' swore.

"One uv my uncles that lived with granny went over to pap's 'twixt that an' Christmus, an' when he come back he said that pap swore that he never shot the hogs, that he never told nobody to shoot 'em, an' that he didn't 'low he wuz on the place when they wuz shot, ner he wan't. They axed him who he 'lowed did shoot 'em, an' he told 'em 'lowin' wa'n't 'lowin', but that Sizemore mought er shot 'em hisselt to get his neighbor in trouble. Sizemore wuz a moughty mean man, an' he had been accused of that very trick onct. The young'ns all swore that they nuver knowed nothin' about hit tell Jake Singleton come with the warrant, ner they didn't.

"Hit were just about hog killing time when Uncle Jim come back frum over home, an' one frosty Saterdag mornin' he says to me an' granny, 'Children,' sez he, 'that fattenin' hog in the pen is shore eatin' hits head off an' I'm wil-lin' to kill hit ef you'uns air.' So granny had me start a fire under the pot, an' we got ready to kill the hog. Uncle Jim handed me the gun, an' says, 'Here, Gran, you shoot the hog while I grind the butcher knife; I'm a master hand to grind a butcher knife,' sez he.

"I tuck the gun an' shot the hog. I shot him a pretty shoot right behind the year, an' he fell over an' never kicked nor squealed. Well, we got hit cleaned an' cut up an' salted away, an' while I wuz blowin' up the bladder to bust I

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hyeard Uncle Jim say to granny, 'I bin wonderin' a right smart while what made his pap send as smart a boy as that away fer six months, but 'tain't no secret to me now sence I seed him shoot that hog.' Uncle Jim laughed, but granny looked moughty solid an' sad.

"I went home when the school wuz out, an' that fust night mam wanted to know all about granny an' Roarin' Fork an' the young'ns wanted to know all about the school an' so on.

"Finally pap spoke. 'Well, son,' he sez, 'do ye 'low ye have larned a right smart?' I 'lowed I shore thought I had.

" 'Well,' he sez, 'do you 'low yer eddication is finished?' I spoke right up an' told him that Miss Sally said I had just begun an' that they wuz a heap yet fer me to learn.

" 'Well,' he sez, 'Miss Sally, as you call her, is shore right, an' I 'low maybe I can larn ye somethin' myself,' he sez. He spoke very civil an' I never thought o' nothin', an' pretty soon we all laid down.

"The next morning atter breakfast th' old man called me out, an' me an' him walked over to that ivy thicket, him a-leadin' the way. The frost had killed the fyerns, an' there wuz the bones uv them two shoats right in plain sight to ever'body, right again Sizemore's fence on our side. Pap never said a word, but he cut a hickory saplin' an' he come closest to me with hit that anybody ever did, before er sence—er ever will an' be safet."

Gran suddenly resumed work, as if action

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were a necessity, and made a potato hill with quick strong strokes.

"Well," exclaimed Almetta, who had scarcely moved from the beginning of the story, "ef that wuzn't the masterest pass!"

"Well, he shore graduated me from his school that mornin'," continued Gran; "an' hit allers seemed easy to stay away from home arterwards. When I got back to the house mam watched a chanct an' says to me, 'Son, who killed them hogs?' an' I says, 'Now, mam, you got nothin' to do with them hogs, an' the man that shot 'em has paid fur it.' She nuver said another word. She just looked solid and sad, an' I never had noticed till that minute how much mam had the favorence of granny. I allers felt moughty nigh to mam."

"But I want to know what yer pap whooped yer fur? He as good as told yer to shoot 'em," expostulated the girl.

"Well, I never rightly knowed what he whooped me fer," drawled Gran; "but I drawed an idy hit wuz because I never driv them hogs funder up the holler. An' hit were unthoughted."

### III

#### THE STRAIGHT OF THE STORY

**A**LMETTA ANGEL, since her father's death, had lived "about and about" from one place to another, on the headwaters of "Gabriel's Run," and "Creely Creek," and even over on "Little Bear," all of which had their origin in "dreens" from "Indian Head" hill; and she knew and loved the people well, but the river and the river people were new to her and of great interest.

By June she had become quite well acquainted with the neighborhood, from Jimmy's place, at the mouth of Gabriel, to Joe Bentley's, a mile and a half above, where they traded, and to Pepper Ike Ingold's, a mile below, where the postoffice was generally kept during Republican administrations.

Jimmy's renters, the Prices, were the nearest neighbors living in sight, and had come in for the first share of interest after her arrival.

It was a rather tatterdemalion family, of five generations, with "Yaller Bill" Price at the head. Bill's nickname had come naturally, indeed almost unavoidably, on account of a very sallow complexion, showing even in the whites of his black eyes. This, with a tall, stooping, lean figure, gave him a very delicate appear-

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ance, belying the perfect health and iron muscle that were his, even as a gloomy countenance belied his cheerful disposition.

He did not mind being called "Yaller," the name being neither ugly nor approbrious to him. He said simply enough that he "shore could not deny bein' yaller," and so he was thus generally called by everybody but his wife, his mother, and Orlena Ingold. The first two called him Bill out of respect to him, Orlena out of respect to herself.

The senior member of his family was his mother's mother, a granddaughter of Nathan Angel. She was usually addressed as "great-gran." Bill received \$35 a year from the county in quarterly payments for her keep, and this would have been enough to have made Orlena Ingold, who was born an Angel herself, ignore the relationship, had it been the custom in the section to use the term cousin, which it certainly was not.

Great-Gran and Bill's wife, Sarah, a small, frail woman, scarcely middle-aged, sat about the hearth the greater part of the year, smoking dry leaf-tobacco in long-stemmed stone pipes; the pipes, when not in use, were carried in the deep pockets of their calico dresses, with the loose tobacco. They carried colored handkerchiefs in the deep patch pockets of their voluminous aprons. They were no blood kin, but the age of one and the ill health of the other, with the same habits of mind and body, had made them as much alike as two dried peas. They never allowed the fire to go out upon the hearth.

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On the hottest day a shovel full of embers could be found in the ashes.

Bill's grown daughter, Teacy, a good-natured, swarthy, homely woman, was much older than his other two children, Loretta and Chunky. They were respectively twelve and thirteen years old, and it was their coming which had permanently invalidated the mother.

Teacy was not Sarah Price's daughter, but that of a "woman," and had been "laid down" to Bill when he was just grown. His mother had reared her and she had come to live with her father as a young girl, when Sarah's health failed. Teacy was a hard worker on occasions though usually easy-going, and she and her pap ran the place.

When she brought a son into the family in her eighteenth year, being still unmarried, and so far as anybody knew not even "talking" to a sweetheart, it caused no great disturbance in "Yaller Bill's" family, and little Joe was loved and petted by them all, and great-gran taught him to smoke her pipe when he was five years old.

Bill's mother, known as Granny Pop—her name being Polly—had come to live with them only recently, after the disappearance of her youngest son with whom she had lived. She brought with her the only child of this son, little lame Heppy, who had visions, and "handled quare talk" when excited, prating of Heaven and Hell, and the "two roads" leading thereto.

Granny Pop was hale and hearty and could turn her hand to any kind of work, and when

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she and Teacy were both in the field or elsewhere, Heppy could get about on her crutch and beat Loretta frying corn-cakes and fat meat, and so they found their own places and were welcome in the heterogeneous family, which, with all its five generations, was not as large as many a one with neither grannies nor grandchildren.

The Joe Bentleys, who kept the store, were rather a young family, the two oldest children being girls, ten and twelve, named Jettie and Rettie; and Almetta liked them very much.

Their father's store at the mouth of Creely was familiarly known as "Joe's," and was the only one for miles around. It was, like all in that region, a general store, a modest prototype of the modern department store, with dry goods, groceries, patent medicines, millinery, etc., in the main room, which was about twenty by forty feet in size. A box of salt fat bacon and one barrel of brown sugar and another of coal-oil, with some of the simpler forms of hardware and harness, were kept in the shed room at one side, and here also were the hides, wool and roots taken in trade. Any line of goods, supposed to be kept, might be out of stock at any time, and remain out for weeks and even months.

The bringing in of a wagon-load of goods from the far-off station, or better still, a boat-load up the winding river, were marked events.

It was a great excursion for Almetta to take a sack or a pair of saddle pockets on Jimmy's horse and go to "Joe's" for salt, sugar, coffee, soda, or calico for a dress or apron and a visit

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with Jettie and Rettie. Occasionally, too, she went to the postoffice at Pepper Ike's and brought Orlena a letter from one of the children, perhaps the son in the Philippines, or one of the daughters in the West; or it might be a package of seeds from Washington for Jimmy. Gran got letters occasionally, but she herself had never received one.

She enjoyed the transient boarders who stopped occasionally, especially the drummers and outside folk, who called Jimmy and Orlena "Mr. and Mrs. Ingold." She thought this very fine and sometimes tried it herself, and made Gran blush at the table by saying demurely, "Mr. Duke, let me give you another cup of coffee."

While she was making so many new and interesting acquaintances she was unconsciously revealing herself, especially to Orlena, who had a mature woman's appreciation of a "straight" girl, and to Gran, who had a young man's appreciation of one who was not only pretty but independent.

June came in with a little tip-tilted "wet" new moon, and was hot and showery. Orlena's garden grew apace and was ready for use and the great rosebushes were clumps of pink and red.

Almetta came in one morning with an apron full of peas, a rose pinned on her bosom, and the exclamation, "It is going to be another sweltersome day."

"Yes, hit's good growing weather on a body's truck too," said Orlena. "These hot

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mornin's with the rain comin' ever' arternoon is bringin' the stuff moughty fast."

"But hit's bringin' the weeds too," said Almetta; "an' I 'low I'll have to help to hoe corn in the cove to-morrow."

"Yes, Jimmy 'lowed him and the boys could finish the second hoein' in the bottom an' on the banks by noon to-day, but the blackberry cove is so steep hit can't be ploughed, and hit 'ill take pyore hoein'. We must finish skelpin' the weeds out o' them bean rows to-day. Fetch a pan out'n the kitchen, honey," she advised; "an' I'll he'p ye shell yer peas."

Almetta brought a pan from the kitchen and set it in the older woman's lap, so she herself would make the long reach, and divided the peas with her, piling handfuls in her lap behind the pan.

Pulling up a chair for herself, they began shelling peas into the pan and dropping the hulls back into their aprons. They worked rapidly and in silence for a few minutes.

It was a quiet, peaceful scene. Orlena's home consisted of two log rooms known as the "upper house" and the "lower house" (as they stood with the river) with a wide stone chimney between.

Each "house" had a good "loft" overhead, and the outside chimney corners, which had resulted from the "houses" having been built with the chimney between, and not inside of either, were called wardrobes, and were used as storage places for saddles, tools, or anything needing protection from the weather.

## *ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN*

Jimmy and Orlena Ingold had got the house and a good farm, partly by inheritance and partly by trading with the other heirs; and had in recent years remodeled it to the extent of having a grate for the use of the abundant coal put in the fireplace of the "upper house," one small window let into the front wall of each house, and a boxed ell for kitchen and dining-room built on at the back.

The front porch, running the length of the building, and shaded by the fast-growing paper trees, not only afforded a delightful resting-place, but was the scene of a variety of woman's work.

A number of old apple-trees in the yard, while they had never been trimmed or sprayed, still bore "several" apples in good fruit years: and like Orlena herself, showed that the original stock must have been very good and quite hardy.

There were althea bushes and mallows, both of which Orlena called "lilies," for later blooming, and great bushes of red and pink June roses already brightening the scene and filling the air with their fragrance. Besides these Orlena had planted beds of annual "blossoms," putting brushwood over to keep out marauding chickens, and which would be very gay in the summer and fall. Young corn and potato patches flanked the yard on both sides, and the barnyard with its sheds and cribs stretched at the back.

The place was known far and wide for its gentility, and for the fact that they "allers

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kept a plenty.” There were, even that far up the river, some more ambitious looking places, a few even with painted weatherboards, but none pleasanter; and the “river men” coming with their boatloads of goods, or going down on the timber, always counted themselves lucky when they could “tie up” for the night in this vicinity and “get to stay” at Jimmy’s.

Many a lazy boatman, observing the lengthening shadows of the late afternoon, had stepped up lively with the push-pole to make it before night, or lagged back for fear of passing too early.

It was no wonder that Almetta, who had seen much of the seamy side of life on the heads of the creeks, appreciated her present refuge in this superior river home and confided to Gran that “hit were a mighty easy place to be satisfied in.”

Orlena, whose own children were married and gone, never had any trouble with help; she had a way with her that invited confidence, and was fair in her ways.

Girls who admitted that they “did not delight in the work at home,” gave her faithful service. She had wonderful striped blankets put away in the boxes on the wall that she would never need in her own house-keeping, that their willing hands had helped spin and weave, and Lady Puzzle quilts, and quilts with Loaming Stars, and Rainbow Roses, and the lovely Rose of Sharon.

The pleasant shelter of her home, with her “good counsel,” had brought more than one

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girl through a dangerous time. Folded away in some of the quilts on Orlena's shelves were faint yellow stains of teardrops that had come with confession and good resolution as woman and girl bent over the work together. Orlena's girls always left with good names, whatever they might have come with, and usually married out of the place.

Almetta, who was both a good listener and a good talker, and was willing to be either, when things were cosy, soon broke the silence by remarking, "Peas is very good sass, Orlena, I never seen none like these till I come here, though Granny Ann's got a very good gyarden."

"Has she?"

"Yes, she allers has a world o' beans an' taters, an' they air the main sass."

"Yes, they air the main sass," agreed Orlena.

"You an' Granny Ann is very clost akin, ain't ye, Orlena?"

"Yes, me an' Ann air own brother's children, but I ain't seen her in allers."

"I loved Granny Ann, an' I'd 'a' liked to a stayed on with her," said the girl; "but when Alifair's man got killed an' she come on'm with her young'ns, they didn't 'pear to be no benefit in havin' so many, though Granny told me I could stay if I didn't mind scrougin'; but I 'lowed it would be fairer to make room for Alifair's young'ns."

"I'm very glad you come here," said the woman.

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“Well, I hadn’t ’lowed to come this far when I started from Granny’s. Uncle Gabe Angel was the cause of my comin’ here. I had got as fur as Peter’s and was a settin’ on his bars with my budget, wonderin’ whether to go in and ax Polly to let me stay there or to go on to Big Ike’s, when he come along and counseled me to come here. Uncle Gabe has shore been a stake to me.” She paused and added, “He made Betty take me when mam died; she hadn’t lotted on doin’ hit nuther.”

The turn of the conversation reminded Orlena of a story she had heard about the girl and had wondered about before, so she asked, “Almetty, how did you come to be livin’ with Ann?”

“Why, I jest went there one day and took up,” said the girl simply.

“I hyeard ye got ill an’ throwed dishwater on your sister Betty one day, an’ she throwed ye out. Hit wa’n’t so, I reckon.”

“Naw, hit wa’n’t so,” said Almetta hotly. “I never throwed no dishwater on her, and she never throwed me out nuther.”

“Wall, now,” said Orlena deprecatingly and soothingly, “somebody’s allers a-makin’ a great big somethin’ out’n a moughty little.”

She shrewdly guessed that while a “great matter was kindled by a very little fire,” it usually took some spark to kindle it, and she was willing to hear the girl’s own version of what happened.

“You did live with Betty a while arter yer maw died, didn’t you?” The woman’s smooth,

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sympathetic tone conquered the girl's hot flash of anger and she followed the lead willingly.

"Yes," she said; "Betty was the main oldest one of us young'ns. She married when she was jest turned in to fifteen, and when mam died she had two children an' was livin' on the head of Gabriel doin' very well. The rest of the young'ns was married er dead er workin' fur theirselves, before pap died, 'ceptin' me an' Sid. Sid was the baby one, an' I was next, an' mammy wouldn't give us up. Me an' her an' him had lived around at a heap o' places: some uv'm wuzn't much more'n jist what you might call a shelter, but we'd allers hung together, me an' him an' her, and allers had some place to stay.

"Orleny," said the child earnestly, "I never have lacked for a shelter. Mam allers told us that they was a heap o' trouble, but ef we'd be honest an' peaceable, they'd allers be a comin'-out place: and they allers has."

"Wuz yer maw much able to work when yer pap died?" inquired Orlena.

"Well, I reckon she wuz. She shore wuzn't able to git along without workin'. Pap wuz sick a long time an' had to have doctor medicine, an' ever'thing had been sold off an' we wuz rentin'."

"That wuz a moughty bad shape to be left in," said Orlena sympathetically. "How did you all make out to git along?"

"Well, mam wuz very managin'. Sometimes she'd rent a little place in the head uv a holler some'ers where they wuz new ground to

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tend an' no ploughin' needed, an' we'd dig in a little crap with the hoes and tend hit, an' sometimes she'd find a place where they wuz wantin' a lot of wool worked up, an' we'd spend the winter, and mam would pick an' wash and cyard an' spin an' weave, er she'd quilt er wash er cook an' wait on hands. She could turn her hand to any kind of work, mam could, indoors er out. She never ast it no odds. I believe in my heart mam was the smartest turned woman I ever seen."

"Whar were ye all a-livin' when she died?"

"Well, we wuz a-livin' in a little house away in the head of a holler on Tice Bolin's land. She had just finished a web uv blankets fur Tice's Tilly, an' we'd moved into a little shack uv a house on his land, an' wuz fixin' to tend a crop, when she took sick and died. Hit wuz new ground and we'd been cleanin' up and burnin' breshheaps, an' Tice's boy Tom had helped mam saw the rail-cuts to fence hit. They had the rails all split an' we had the fence nearly done. One Sat'd'y evenin' mam an' us young'ns wuz workin' at hit, tryin' to finish hit, so mam could go to plantin' a Monday. We wuz jist gittin' through at dusky dark, and mam started to lay up the last rail on top uv the panel, when she was tuck with a ketch in her side. She kinder moaned a little bit an' eased the rail down to the ground, and then she set right down by hit, all kinder drawed an' bunched together like, and both hands clinched over her side. For a little while Sid and I were not worried. She had been tuck that er way

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a time er two before, an' once she had to lay in bed a long time with hit.

“This time they wuzn't the color uv blood in her face, an' she wuz speechless, 'cept fur a little low kind uv a shaky moanin'. Arter a while she got a leetle better an' I says to Sid, 'Come on, brother, le's lay this last rail up an' he'p mammy to the house.' Hit wuzn't but a step. Mam hadn't spoke tell that minute, but when I took aholt uv the rail, she sez, 'Never mind, honey, jest let hit lay.'

“Hit weren't fur to the house, an' me and Sid holp her in. Hit wuz hard dark by that time, an' the whipperwills wuz a-hollerin' the lonesomest I ever hyeard 'em. She got wuss ag'in, an' I made Sid go fer Tice's Tilly. Mam went to chillin', an' I built up a big bresh-wood fire an' put ever' thread uv ever'thing in the house over her, but I couldn't warm her up no way I tried, an' hit peered like Sid an' Tilly never would come.

“Arter a while she stopped shakin' an' got hot, an' me an' her talked some. She had a fashion uv talkin' yearnest to us young'ns when she had us to herself. She said she wuzn't afeared to die: that she never had done nobody no harm an' she knowed, in reason, the Good Old Man wuz a friend to her. I tried to tell her to hush, that she wuzn't a-goin' to die, but to save my life I couldn't, an' arter a while Tilly and Sid come. Tilly made coonroot an' spignet tea, an' rubbed and worked with her, but hit 'peered like nothin' never eased her, an' about midnight she got franzy an' talked an'

## THE STRAIGHT OF THE STORY

tossed an' tumbled, jest ramblin', you know, about a quare lot uv things. She talked about her mammy and the 'Lone Star' quilt she'd made when she wuz a little gal; an' about her pappy, an' her little sister that died, an' a heap uv things. Just before day she'd been layin' still for a while, apparently asleep, an' all uv a suddent she called out, 'Pappy, pappy, bring the boat to this side.'—She were raised on the river, you know—an' her eyes popped wide open an' she says, 'Where's Sid? Where's Almetty?' I wuz right there, but Sid had fell right down in the floor an' went to sleep. Tilly drug him up an' brung him to mammy, an' she says, 'Hug me tight, 'round the neck, Sugar. I'm jest goin' acrost the river a little ways, but I may be gone a right smart while.' "

There were no tears either in the eyes or in the voice of the girl, but a deep sense of mysticism, which was shared by the older woman, and both sat silent what time a spirit might vacate its earthly home and start upon its long journey.

"Hit were a Sunday," resumed Almetta. "Hit 'pears like I wuz sort o' dull an' don't pime blank remember all that went on that day, but mam had a heap o' friends an' there wuz a good deal uv comin' an' goin', makin' the coffin an' the clo'es an' gettin' her ready. They all 'lowed pap wuz buried so fur away that they'd never git her there, so they buried her out on the p'int, a little ways from the house next to a thicket of young sugar trees. Hit were the gray uv the mornin' when she died: an' the sun-

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ball had jest drapped behind the hill when they finished fillin' the grave, but hit wuz broad daylight.

"Part uv the children had come to the buryin', an' Betty amongst 'em; but nothin' had been said about what wuz to become uv me an' Sid.

"Betty tuck on a sight when she looked at mam the last time at the grave, before they nailed the coffin down tight, but she wuz very peart by the time the grave was filled. Me and Sid was jest a-standin' there a-snubbin'. Betty got on her horse an' tuck her baby in her lap, an' about that time Uncle Gabe Angel jest reached down an' picked me up an' set me on behind her an' says, 'She'll be a heap o' help an' company to ye, Betty,' an' then he turned 'round an' tuck Sid by the hand an' says, 'Brother, you an' me had better be travelin'. Hit'll be dark now before we git home, an' yer aunt Lize'll be worryin' 'bout us'n.' I'll allers feel nigh to Uncle Gabe. Well, we all went off the p'int together, an' Sid an' Uncle Gabe went down the creek an' me an' Betty crossed the hill.

"I went back to mam's grave that fall wuz a year, an' the farewell summers wuz a bloomin' all over hit an' the sugar trees wuz red as blood. I tuck enough rails off'n that fence she'd built to make a pen 'round her grave, without axin' a soul fer 'em. I found that last rail she'd had to lay down layin' right where she'd left hit. I sorter hated to move hit, but I laid hit right acrost the top."

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“Did you an’ Betty mostly git along very well?” asked Orlena, resuming the shelling of the peas, which both had forgotten.

“Oh, yes,” said Almetta, herself resuming work. “She wuz very good to me while I stayed, though she wuz very lean about takin’ me in. I took a whole lot of care uv the young’ns an’ helped about the place. Hit were a very pretty place too, just above Granny Ann’s.

“I used to love to go down to Granny Ann’s. She’d give me sweet apples, an’ I’d pack water fer her f’m the spring. She never was mad at me but onct. Betty sent me down there one day to borry Granny’s needle. I never will fergit the looks uv that needle, with a long double black thread in it an’ hit crooked. Granny Ann had had hit fer allers, an’ she called hit ‘Old Crook.’ Well, as I wuz comin’ home the back way through the field, I got ter lookin’ fer ground cherries an’ lost hit. I never missed hit from where I’d stuck hit in my bosom, tell I’s nearly home. Well, I went back and sarched and sarched, but I couldn’t find that needle nowheres. I wuz afeared to tell Betty I’d lost hit, so I jest hollered and told her she couldn’t have Granny’s needle that day. Uv course she ’lowed Granny wuz usin’ hit.

“Two er three days arter that though me an’ Betty passed Granny Ann’s cow huntin’, an’ Granny come out on us and says, ‘Betty, air ye through with Old Crook?’ Betty says, ‘Why, I hain’t had Old Crook sence last winter,’ an’ Granny says, ‘Hit’s a pity ye hain’t, when I sent

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her to ye a Monday,' an' then both uv 'em took a thought an' looked at me. Granny Ann says, 'Almetty, where's that needle I lent ye a Monday, when ye come down here 'lowin' Betty wuz a-wantin' a long crooked needle to quilt with?' I backed off an' says, 'Ye never lont me no needle.' I knowed I wa'n't 'ceivin' nobody. Granny made a retch at me with a clo'es-stick she had in her han', an' I jest civilly flew. Betty 'lowed I orter be whooped, but hit wa'n't her needle and she never tipped me.

"I went up to Tish Angel's that week an' begged her out uv one an' sent hit to Granny, but I don't think she ever thought very high uv hit. She complained uv hit bein' too straight.

"Not long arter that, though, I found Granny's fine heifer calf with hits head hung in the palin', an' I jerked a slat off an' saved hit, an' Granny 'lowed I wuz pow'ful smart, an' that wuz the only racket me an' her ever had."

"Wuz hit then that you went to live with Ann?" asked Orlena, coming back patiently to the thread of the dishwater story, from which so many excursions had been made.

"No, hit were long arter that. Hit were jest before Betty's little Armilda come there. Betty had been contrary an' unreasonin' with me fer a long time, an' one day Bob had promised to break up a late turnip patch fer her, an' 'stid o' doin' hit, he'd rid off some'ers down the creek. Hit made her moughty ill, an' she had been takin' hit out on me all mornin'.

"Arter dinner me an' her wuz washin' the dishes; the pan wuz settin' on a little narrer

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slab-table; one uv hits legs wuz a little grain shorter than t'other, makin' hit sorter rockeldy. Well, Betty kept yaggerin' about one thing an' another, till I finally drapped the pot-lid in the dishpan an' hit sorter splashed a little, an' she broke out on me ag'in.

"I wuzn't mad till then, but hit flew all over me in a minute. The dishpan wuz very full anyway, an' I jes' teched one uv the table-legs the least with my foot, an' the table jest creeled over the least grain on that short leg, an' the water jest riz on her side uv the pan an' slipped over on her apron as easy. She wuz a-standin' right ag'in' hit an' hit made jest a narrer wet streak acrost her."

Almetta ducked her head and shrugged her shoulders and chuckled in delighted memory. "I never 'lowed she'd know I done hit, but she did, an' she jest retched acrost that pan an' slapped me clean out the door (we had the table right in front uv hit to git the air); an' I landed sittin' in the top uv a little peach-tree that had come up almost in the door an' Bob was aimin' to move hit in the fall. Hit finaciously ruined the tree, but hit never hurt me a grain.

"Betty wuz scairt slap to death. I know in reason she thought she had killed me, but she hadn't. She never spoke an' I never. I set there a spell an' studied to myself, 'She never axed me to come, an' she won't have to ax me to leave,' an' I riz off'n that wreck uv a bush an' walked out bareheaded, just like I come. Betty never spoke a word to say go er stay; and I didn't wait long to be axed. I 'low she

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was too glad to see me able to walk to think about stopping me.

“So I went down the creek, an’ as I wuz passin’ Granny Ann’s she were settin’ out in the yard pickin’ geese. I stopped an’ watched her a spell, an’ finally I axed her if she didn’t want me to help her hold the gander. That wuz the masterest old gray gander you ever seen. She ’lowed she didn’t care,<sup>1</sup> an’ I went in, an’ me and her picked a whole passel uv geese. Long about supper-gettin’ time I took the buckets an’ went to the spring an’ fetched water; an’ then I hunted up splinters an’ put a fire in the stove and carried in stove wood: By that time I reckon granny sensed it that I wuz a-wantin’ to stay, fer I seen her fix another place at the table (they wuz jest her an’ Uncle Ed’ard there, an’ she allers et with him), an’ she says, ‘Almetty, I guess we’d better have honey fer supper; an’ I knowed I wuz ’lected.

“Arter a while Uncle Ed’ard come home (Uncle Ed’ard never did have the sense that Granny Ann’s got), an’ he come in the kitchen axin’ qnestions. ‘Hello, Almetty,’ he says, ‘you here? What you doin’ here?’ he says; an’ before I could shape to answer, Granny Ann spoke right up. She says, ‘Why, I’m a-needin’ her right bad, an’ she’s a-goin’ to stay with me a spell,’ and that’s pime blank how I come to be livin’ at Granny Ann’s. She said she were a-needin’ me, an’ the Lord knows I were a-needin’ her.”

<sup>1</sup> Was quite willing.

## IV

### THE WANTS OF A WOMAN

AS Jimmy hitched his chair up to the supper table, one evening in early July, he said to his wife, "Orleny, as I passed down by Cinthy Bolin's this afternoon she come down to the fence an' called me to tell ye to come up."

"What did she say she wanted me to come fer?"

"She never said; she jest said be shore an' tell ye to come up the fust chance. I wuz in a considerable press (hit must 'a' been four o'clock), an' I never stopped to talk."

"How wuz Cinthy lookin'?"

"I never noticed nothin' wrong with her. I seed she had a fine chance uv taters an' other sass in her gyarden."

"I ain't seed Cinthy in allers," said Orlena, "not sense long before that last baby come there: an' hit must be better'n four months old. I wonder what she could be wantin'?"

"Well, I don't know; she jest said fer ye to come up."

"I a little believe I'll go up there one day next week an' see how they are farin'. Cinthy wuz one uv the civilest turned gals I ever had about me."

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"Did she used to stay here with you?" asked Almetta.

"Yes, she stayed with me the winter before she was married. She wuz wantin' to work out some little tricks fer herself. Me an' her pap wuz a little bit uv kin, an' me an' her mammy is clost connections. Her pap wuz jest a renter an' not very providin'."

"Her man ain't very providin' neither," said Jimmy, "but Cinthy is moughty workin' an' managin'."

The next morning after Jimmy brought the message from Cinthy, Orlena was sitting in front of the upper house peeling red June apples for a pie. The men were off at work and Almetta was "battling" clothes at the spring under the hill, when Gabriel Angel stopped in front of the fence and called, "Howdy."

"Why, howdy, Gabriel; cross over," said Orlena cordially.

"No, I ain't hardly time, I reckon."

"Why, git right down an' come in; you needn't be in no hurry," urged the woman.

"Yes, I'm in right smart uv a press." As he sat still upon his horse, the woman rose and went down to the fence.

"Well, how air yer folks?" she asked.

"Ay, well enough, I reckon. All stirrin' an' I don't hear no complaint."

"Where yer goin' now in sich a hurry?"

"I'm goin' down ter git Abe's Molly to come up fer Cinthy Bolin's baby."

"Why, hush, what's the matter with Cinthy?"

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"Cinthy's dead."

"Why, what air ye talkin' 'bout, Gabriel? You know Cinthy's not dead!"

"Cinthy's dead too."

"Why, what ailed her? She wa'n't sick ner nothin', was she?"

"Naw, she wa'n't complainin' special at all: Lish said though she's been kind uv drinlin' all spring, an' didn't seem to git no stren'th sence that last baby come thar, an' not able to work none."

"Why, I ain't heard a word 'bout her not bein' able to work. 'Pears like I'd 'a' heard hit," said the woman unwilling to believe.

"Well, she's made out to do her housework, an' she's made a very good gyarden, but she ain't done no field work at all. She washed a big washin' yist'd'y, an' 'peared to be all right last night, Lish said; an' she had done the things an' let down the quiltin' frame this mornin' an' started to quiltin'. Jim's Viny went over early to git some turnip seed Cinthy had promised her, an' found her settin' by the quiltin'-frame, speechless, with the needle clutched tight in her hand."

"You know she didn't!"

"Yes, Viny got her to bed an' called the children an' Lish. Him an' the two oldest uns jest happened to be hoein' out a little patch clost to the house, an' got thar before she quit breathin': but she never spoke. She jest looked at 'em hard, Viny said, like she wanted to tell 'em somethin', but she couldn't tell what hit wuz. Viny axed her if she had prayed, an' she

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shet her eyes an' opened 'em ag'in, an' then Viny axed her ef she wuz willin' ter die, an' she shet her eyes an' never opened 'em again."

"Well, ef that don't beat all!—an' Cinthy's dead!" murmured the woman in slow grieved tones; "an' what air a-goin' to become uv all them little young'ns, lone handed?"

"Why, we've got to divide 'em up amongst us, I reckon. Her mammy is a good old woman, but they ain't none uv 'em in no shape to take the young'ns; an' they air all so little that something's got to be done right at onct."

"Yes, something will have to be done."

"Viny sent right arter me, an' I'm on my way now down to Abe's to see if Molly will take the baby one."

"That'll be all right," said Orlena. "Cinthy's baby's pime blank the same age as Molly's; they was born the same night."

Both woman and man knew, in detail, the story of Molly's twins and how one of them had lived only a few days—just long enough to make her feel that two babies were right, and to feel the emptiness of only one.

Gabriel Angel well allowed that big-hearted Molly would give Cinthy's baby a welcome in place of her own lost little one.

"She will take hit all right, I know in reason," said Orlena.

"Yes, that's what Viny an' me wuz 'lowin', an' I wuz 'lowin' you'd take one uv t'others," said Gabriel.

"Yes, I'll take the next oldest one," she said

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quite simply, "ef Lish'll give hit up, an' of course he'll have to."

"Well, me an' Lize can handle the next one; they's jest them two little gals besides the baby, you know, that they's any needcessity fur takin'. Marthy an' the boys'll have to help they pap, but them two little ones is too little to take to the field; they'd fall out and maybe git kilt, his land is so steep."

"Well, we can take them betwixt us an' hit won't be very hard on none uv us."

"Little children is very easy handled."

"Shore, shore," said Gabriel. "Viny 'lowed she could take one ef she had to," he continued. "But they are right smartly scrouged at her place, with a big fambly an' jes' one house."

"Lish and the four oldest uns can git along. Marthy is turned a heap like her maw, an' is moughty smart. Cinthy was moughty smart as long as she helt out."

"Yes, Cinthy was smart," said Orlena sadly and slowly, "moughty smart an' workin' an' honest."

"Too smart," said Gabriel sympathetically, "an' now she's gone. Well, Viny's with 'em now, but she can't stay no longer than to-night."

"Will they bury her this afternoon?"

"Yes, I reckon they can't hardly git ready before late though. The houses is small an' they cook in one of them, an' hit would be the best to bury her this evenin'. So I sent Sid arter her maw."

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

"Yes, hit would be the best," agreed Orlena. "Who's makin' the coffin?"

"Hen Holiday's a goin' ter make hit. Lish's got some very nice inch poplar plank he'd got to make a loft over the upper house last winter, but he never made hit, an' hit'll come in handy fer the coffin.

"Viny 'lowed you could come by the store an' git the truck, an' come up arter twelve an' help line hit, ef yer want to. She said to git five yards uv black calico an' five uv bleach, an' a box uv springs, an' she 'lowed hit'd be nice to have some narrer blue ribbon to trim hit with, but she said fer yer to do jist as yer pleased about hit. They won't none uv her people git thar in time to he'p with the things."

"Well, all right," said Orlena. "Who's makin' the grave-clo'es?"

"Marthy Lewis is 'tendin' to 'em; we 'lowed she'd be a good hand. She's got a machine an' her sister Mary can help her. Her an' Cinthy was jist uv a size, an' she lives clost, so we sent her word to go ahead an' make 'em."

"That's all right. Marthy's young, but she's very smart."

"Well, I'll be goin' on down to Abe's. When air ye comin' to see us, Orleney?"

"Why, I'll be up before long, Uncle Gabriel. Why don't you an' Lize come down?"

"We will; we'll be down before long. You come up."

"I will. You come."

"Well, good-by."

"Good-by."

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Orlena called Almetta from the wash-place and gave her directions about getting dinner for the men and finishing her washing "after twelve."

She put the side-saddle on one of the mules, with the girl's help, changed her gray calico apron for a "white grounded" one with a black speck, changed her gray bonnet for a black muslin one, threw the saddle pockets across the saddle, mounted and rode away.

She knew exactly what it took to make a coffin. Many a one had she helped line and had made one, out and out once, when the men were all away on the big spring tide, and Nance Angel's baby had come still-born, so it was no unusual errand upon which she started.

It was an interesting road that she traveled, winding along the streams and in and out of them, coming out into the open sunshine for long stretches and again dipping under overhanging cliffs. The large leaves of the young hickory and those of the linn, smooth and aurate, with the palmlike umbrella trees, gave the forest an almost tropical appearance.

Blue and brown lizards ran over the old rail fences and stopped and looked at her with a seeming closeness of attention and rigidity of attitude that to a nervous person might have seemed almost hypnotic.

She saw, by a simple habit of seeing, everything along the road—that one neighbor's corn was foul with weeds, and another's was clean: who had fenced a little and who was needing to:

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but her thoughts were not of these things, but of Cinthia, the girl, the woman, the departed, and of the possible exigencies of the day and how they should be met, and of her own commitment to taking one of the children. Most of all she was turning over in her mind Cinthia's message. She would have given much to know what the dead woman had been wanting of her.

It was high noon when Orlena stopped at Joe's for the coffin linings. She knew the time by the sun, though Joe's clock pointed to half-past eleven and her own at home said a quarter to one.

"She's a little slow," said Joe, seeing Orlena's eye on the clock. "I'll wind her up and set her in a few minutes now. Hit's about noon now, I reckon."

The goods were brought and put in the saddle bags, and Orlena turning her mule's head up Creely, came by the rough creek road to the house of mourning.

The little windowless, two-roomed, boxed cottage stood not quite in the shade of a large elm-tree and looked quite small in the bright light of early afternoon. It would have looked very bare but for the rank growth of "blossoms" which crowded each other on both sides of the path and encroached upon it in places—marigolds, bachelor buttons, four o'clocks, princess feathers, and the long drooping pink lady-fingers.

The shade of the tree had been utilized by the dead woman as a washing place. A tub hung against the tree, a small kettle stood on a stone

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at one side, and a battling-block and short slab bench occupied the thickest of the shade.

Lish, stunned and desolate, sat there with baby Ettie fast asleep in his arms. Emma Jane played at his feet, and the other children, save Martha, the eldest, stood about in forlorn bewilderment. Martha had cooked and served the corn-bread and beans to the family and visiting neighbors, and washed the dishes, and seeing Orlena coming, was at the gap in the low fence ready to help her "light."

The child had not shed a tear, but when Orlena, after helping her hitch the mule and take off the saddlebags, turned and gathered her in her arms, she clutched her convulsively and cried; "Oh, mam! Oh, mam! Oh, mammy, mammy! Orlena, I can't stand hit; I can't stand hit; I can't stand hit!"

Orlena drew her close and said in slow, even tones, "Oh, yes, Marthy, you'll have to stan' hit. *What has been stood can be stood*, an' you'll jest have to do like the rest uv us women, stand what the good Lord sees fit to put on us. He'll not overload ye, honey."

This brave creed of the mountain women, who stand the ills which flesh is heir to with a heroism which they must get from God, the child would have accepted with nothing to soften it; but Orlena knew how to adorn the doctrine, and added tender words of assurance and pity. "The Lord will help ye hisself, darlin'; an' all the neighbors 'll help; an' yer pap an' the chil'-ern. Ye'll have to take right smart care uv yer pap, Marthy."

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How often, in the towns, a girl left like this is watched over by her mother's friends with a view to helping her keep young and encouraging her to play. Not so in the hills, where every good woman who comes in gives the girl a hint as to how she may work and manage and "be a woman."

The stunned child who went into Orlena's arms with a cry for her mammy and that, she "could not stand it," came out an awakened woman, conscious of the harness and ready to wear it. She went now and sat by her father, taking the baby from him, and Orlena went into the house.

The nearer neighbor women had washed the body and it lay on a scaffold of boards, covered with a sheet, waiting for the grave-clothes and coffin. The women took Orlena's bundles and went out back of the house, where Hen Holiday was just finishing the coffin. They covered it outside with the black calico, and inside with the white cotton, trimming the inner edge with the blue ribbon and a ruffle of white cotton lace which Orlena had added of her own accord.

By-and-by Martha Lewis came with the grave-clothes finished. Orlena examined them approvingly. "I'm glad yer got a light-grounded piece for the dress," she said.

"Yes, I'd a liked ter 'a' had a snow-white one," said Martha, "but Joe jest had two er three pieces uv dress-goods an' they wuz all dark but this one with the blue flower."

"Ay, hit's all right," said Orlena; "the flowers jest makes hit pretty."

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Martha had brought everything new, and she and Orlena dressed the body, drawing over the work-worn hands the white cotton gloves.

At last all was ready, and the coffin, with its rough boards hidden and its brave bit of ribbon and lace, all so perishable, held the still more perishable body of the woman, who had been brave in life without either ribbon or lace. The little tendrils of sun-burned yellow hair, which had been smoothed back properly, curled down lightly about her temples, but the dark fringed eyelids stayed down of themselves as if too tired ever to lift.

Gabriel Angel lifted Emma Jane to look, and she said, "Pretty mammy!"

Cinthia's best bonnet was taken down from its nail and laid across her knees.

The white bonnet and gloves, the new shoes, but more than all the white dress with the blue flower in it, seemed to suggest that she was starting upon a pleasant journey. But Cinthia was gone, had been gone since early morning, when her fingers, putting in the careful stitches, had fallen idle before the dew was dry on the lady-fingers blooming at her door. And none of the folk who had been busily engaged in paying the last debts of good neighborship to her, who had ever shown a "Christian heart" among them, doubted that she was consciously in glory, and to the least one they conceived of it as a great shining, with only rest and play.

The coffin sat upon two hickory chairs. The only one remaining chair was occupied by Cinthia's mother, who had come a little while be-

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fore, a woman bent and old and weather-beaten, but gentle-mannered and dignified. She had come in and been received without ado, though Orlena and some of the other women had come quietly and put their arms around her, kissing being little practised. She had smoothed back the curling tendrils of hair, patted the little bow which Martha Lewis had fashioned for the neck, murmuring; "Pore little Cinthy, pore little Cinthy! Mammy would a heap druther to 'a' went first. Hit allers minded ever' word me an' hits pap said to hit. Hit was shore the best child on the place an' the smartest; God bless hits little life." Truly the wearing years had slipped away from Cinthia, and she was but her mother's little child.

After a while the mother sat silent, with drooped head and far-away look, and the women dried their eyes upon their aprons.

Hen Holiday, who had a natural aptitude for carpentry and a few tools, had also a sympathetic nature and gentle manners, and so was by mutual consent the undertaker for the neighborhood, giving his time and labor, and often the lumber, as he was the miller too, as a matter of course without a thought of pay, and rarely ever receiving any. He came now and stooping over the mother as she sat with bowed head, said quietly,

"We ain't aimin' to hurry ye none, Ev'line, but when ye think we had better start, why, ever'thing is ready. But you jest take yer own time. Whenever you an' Lish is ready will suit the rest uv us."

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“Well,” said the woman, lifting herself wearily, “hit’ll be gittin’ late, an’ they’s no benefit in waitin’; hit mought come up to rain ag’in. We’d as well to go.”

Lish and the children and friends came in and watched as Martha Lewis laid a white cloth over the dead woman’s face, and Hen Holiday placed the coffin lid and drove the nails in lightly. It would be lifted and the real farewell would come at the grave.

Half a dozen men carried the coffin out and placed it on a sled and the little company of friends and neighbors accompanied it in irregular procession. A few rode horses or mules, but most of the little company walked. The faces of most of the men were only quiet, but those of the women were tense. It was not as if an illness and a waiting had prepared one’s mind for cheerful resignation; and unweaned children stared solemnly up into the faces of their mothers and were still.

Abe and Molly were there with their living twin, which Abe carried in his arms, while Cinthy’s baby appeared content in the arms of its foster-mother. The next baby, Emma Jane, was riding in Orlena’s lap, and Martha, the eldest, behind her. The four-year-old girl rode on the pommel of Gabriel’s saddle and slapped the horse’s neck with the loose ends of the bridle-reins, calling out cheerfully, “Dit up!” to the slow-moving horse. Lish and the two boys trudged, with their neighbors, behind the sled.

It was not far to the burying-ground, but it

## *ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN*

was hot and sultry, and all were glad to drop down in the shade while Hen Holiday saw that the grave and box were all right.

When all was ready the nails, which had been driven lightly in the coffin-lid, were drawn, and Martha Lewis took away the face-cloth and replaced upon her bosom the right hand, which had slipped a little; surely it was not used to such long repose; and the family drew for the last time in an unbroken circle close about her who had been its center.

There was a bit of wailing and a few broken words from husband and mother in testimony of her goodness, and piteous choking sobs from the older children, before the friends drew them all away, and Hen Holiday replaced the lid, driving the nails down tight. Orlena said simply but quite audibly, "She had a Testament and she follered readin' it. She told me long ago that the Lord had forgive her sins and that she was livin' perfect happy; and now they ain't nothin' for us that's left to do but to try to follow where she's gone."

And so one to whose faithfulness and purity a pæan might have been sung was buried without oration, hymn or spoken prayer, in a grave, dug carefully due east and west, with her face to the east, just as every one else was; but some time in the future the funeral would be held.

This severing of interment and funeral did not seem strange to a people who understood so well the necessity of the custom.

Lish had consented that the little children should go with the neighbors "until Marthy sort

## THE WANTS OF A WOMAN

uv got her bearin's'' with her housekeeping, as Orlena kindly suggested to him.

As Orlena rode away from the grave with the little child, she guessed it must be about four o'clock, and she remembered that at the same hour yesterday Jimmy had "seen nothin' wrong'' with Cinthia.

It had been rather a showery season, and there was a threat of rain. Orlena held the child in her lap and rode home at a brisker gait than usual, but Almetta had been expecting her for some time, and was at the step-block when she rode up.

The little one had enjoyed the ride and had come quietly enough, but when Orlena drew rein at a strange place, and a strange girl held out her hands coaxingly to take her, she drew back, clutching Orlena's arm tightly, and began to cry.

"Don't cry, honey; go to the gal! Why, that's a nice gal an' she'll give yer some supper," but the child clung and whimpered.

"Well, now, Sugar," said the girl caressingly, as she drew the protesting little body down into her arms. "Come on now, me an' you'll get us a pretty. God bless hits little heart, don't cry, Sugar!"

She had the child in her arms, swinging herself and it from side to side as one would hush a babe (it was little more), and crooned fair promises of supper and "pretties."

"Give hit something to eat right now, hit's bound to be hungry," called Orlena as she led her mule around to the barn.

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But the child continued to wail and would not eat, though she drank thirstily and held a piece of bread in her hand, and Almetta, with the universal instinct for motion, light and color, carried her from one "pretty" to another. She stopped whimpering after a while and took a dubious interest in the great white blossoms of the mallows; and putting out the hand with the bread in it, she laid a chubby forefinger in the scarlet chalice of a hollyhock, saying, "Blossie, blossie"; but her own familiar voice in the unfamiliar scene was her undoing. She turned and stared at Almetta, the corners of her mouth quivered and drooped, the bread fell from her hand, and drawing the little finger back against her side, as if the bright blossom had left a sting, she broke into a fresh wail, the last trembling catches of which were only hushed under Almetta's sleepily patting hand, hours after, as the rain pattered upon the roof.

Jimmy, who had been away since early morning, came in quite late for supper, and as Orlena was serving him said, "Hit 'pears like I've had Cinthy Bolin on my mind all day some way. I a little believe ef I wuz you I'd go up thar in the mornin' an' see what she was wantin'."

"I've been to-day," she replied.

"What wuz she wantin'?"

"She never said."

Jimmy looked up quickly and asked, "Anythin' wrong up thar?"

"Well," said Orlena calmly, "only the Lord God knows the difference between right an'

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wrong, an' thar don't appear to be nobody to blame, but they's a smart, good, nacherly healthy woman dead, an' a fambly uv young'ns scattered, an' a little gal left in a woman's place; but Cinthy died without makin' no complaints nor statin' her wants."

## V

### LOVE AND WISDOM

AFTER Cinthia's death and the bringing in of Emma Jane, Almetta was kept at home from the field more than ever. Indeed Jimmy had confided to his wife that the girl's work with the hoe amounted to very little, but that Gran worked as hard again when she worked with him. This was quite unusual, and he thought the boy was trying to make up for and hide her lack: so he left them alone and appeared not to notice, as he was getting the work of two good hands.

"Now, Jimmy," Orlena had protested, "don't you put them young'ns to hoein' by theirselves."

"Orleny, I believe you are plum franzy," replied her sometimes lord and master; "they can't no harm come to them a-hittin' them clods, an' I'm fer gittin' through the weeds"; but he made no protest when she stated that she needed Almetta at the house, other than observing that it would more than likely make her proud.

The girl had quite a knack with children, and had assumed the care of Emma Jane as a matter of course.

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In a few days the little one was trotting happily about the place, or sitting quietly nursing a doll which Almetta had fashioned from a cob and a rag. There was little semblance to the human in this doll, but Almetta had pointed out its features and described its beauty and grace so graphically that the small girl, leaning hard toward the woman, felt no lack. Gran promised that the very next tide that came, he would bring her a real "poppet" doll from "below."

Orlena observed with satisfaction that Almetta was quite unusually impartial to sex,—indeed rather indifferent to the men and boys who came about the place, even to Gran, who was a handsome magnetic fellow and not at all indifferent to the beauty and cheerfulness of the girl.

This indifference to the opposite sex was a rare trait for a girl in her teens in a country where marriage and parenthood are not only the great illuminations of woman's life, but with so many almost the sole illumination.

Almetta made poor use of the hoe in the fields, but she would dig or weed the "blossom" beds and boxes, or carry rich earth for them from the woods until her back and legs ached and her hands trembled; and Orlena's store of fancy patchwork quilts and striped blankets and her wonderful old "kiverlids" filled her with delight. She had helped piece "nine patches" and "diamonds" and "stars," but none like these. The brilliant "Rocky-Mountain" quilt with its exquisite and intricate feather and crown quilting, and the gorgeous "Rainbow

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Rose" filled her with joy, but the mellow harmony of the "Rose of Sharon" appealed to her most, and she pronounced it to be her "fa-vorite."

The thrifty mountain women have two regular seasons of quilting and working with wool—midsummer, between planting and cultivating and harvest, and midwinter, between harvest and planting. These correspond with the logging seasons for the men, when they go to the woods with axes and saws, cant-hooks and hand-spikes, to a purely man's job, leaving the women to their purely feminine work with the "pieces" and the wool.

Very occasionally a woman "drives a saw," or ploughs as very occasionally a man cooks. Neither is usual on the Forks of the Kentucky River. And so during these hot summer days, while Jimmy and Gran and the Prices were "laying-by" the corn and planning to go to the timber, Orlena and Almetta made the spinning-wheel sing or worked over the scraps, contrasting light and dark, and bright and dull, in pleasing combinations.

Almetta was working upon a "diamond" pieced quilt which was to be followed by a "lady-slipper," a conventional design from the familiar little orchid of the hills, in green and yellow and pink on a white ground. It was one of the simpler patterns of the fancy "patch," or appliqué, quilts but very chaste and pretty; and if she succeeded with it well, Orlena who did not object to a pride but abhorred idleness, promised her that she might make a "Rose of

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Sharon" for herself. She said she just knew that if she had a "Rose of Sharon" quilt she'd be "perfect satisfied," but had added, wistfully, "an' if I could read an' write."

She had begun her diamonds quite small, but as imagination leaped forward through the making and quilting of it, and the "lady-slipper," before the goal of the "Rose of Sharon" was approached, she quietly put the small pieces she had cut in the bottom of the pile and was beginning on a much larger scale when Orlena joined her.

"I been a-studyin' on gittin' the loom down an' havin' hit set up," Orlena said. "I ain't wove any fer several years now. But arter all I don't believe I will. I've got enough linsey to make yours and Emma Jane's undercoats; an' I believe I'll send some wool off an' have some cloth made. I seed some mighty pretty cloth that Marthy Lewis had made, an' the loom is so big an' onhandy, it's illconvenient an' awkward to have around. We can spin some more stockin' yarn out'n the spring's wool, an' then have enough of hit left to make a turn to send off; an' I'll just sell the fall's wool. I don't care about workin' hit up nohow. Hit's knotty an' coarse an' don't work up pretty an' saft like the spring shearin's. I been a-thinkin', Almetty, ef they hire a rale knowin' teacher fer the school, that you could go some this fall, ef you've a mind to."

"I'd be proud ter go," said the girl, "but who'd mind Emmy Jane? I ain't a-goin' ter have her a-worryin' you."

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“Why, she wouldn’t be no worryment to me a-tall. She ain’t a grain uv trouble. She’ll jist be good company. God bless hits little heart, hit’s got the favorence uv hits mammy till I couldn’t help pyorely lovin’ hit.”

“I’d shore love to go to school, but I never would git my Rosy quilt made ef I did.”

“Yes, you will; they’s plenty o’ time fer Rosy quilts, as ye call hit. I’m a mind to holp ye make it, and we can piece ag’in next winter an’ fer several winters, as fer as that goes. An’ a little schoolin’ won’t hurt ye.”

“I went nearly all one fall when I lived at Granny Ann’s an’ got a very pretty start.”

“Did ye?”

“Yes. I never had no First Reader, but they wuz a old Second Reader there an’ I took hit, an’ the teacher never knowed the defference. Mammy could read an’ she had larned me an’ Sid our letters an’ to spell some, an’ I got along all right in the Second Reader. The teacher was very smart, an’ could ‘a’ larned us a heap ef she’d ‘a’ tried, but she was very dilatory about attendin’ to the young’ns, an’ some uv ‘em never learned their A.B., abs.”

“Who was she?”

“Why, she war a Benton gal, from away yan, an’ she went to ever’ frolic she could hear uv in the county an’ she allers come back a-lookin’ like the hind wheels uv destruction. Hit’d take her two er three days study sleepin’ ter git over hit, an’ she didn’t care what the young’ns done. But some days she’d stan’ over us with a limb an’ be a pyore teacher.”

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"Well," said Orlena, "you stay with me an' be good an' smart, an' I'll git you all the books ye think you'll need an' let you go to school. I 'low schoolin's better'n marryin' fer young gals."

"I don't never aim ter marry. I've studied on hit some, but hit 'pears to me like cookin' an' washin' an' sewin' an' all the work about a place is too much ter have ter do fer a man that hain't no kin to ye," said Almetta decidedly.

"Well, hit's a right smart," laughed Orlena.

"I'd like to be a school teacher," said the girl placidly, as she matched a deep pink square—which she called red—with a gray one.

"Have ye ever talked any, Almetty?" asked Orlena.

"Yes, a little, but none to hurt," replied the girl.

"Well," said Orlena, "I ain't never been in no country but this one to larn any defferent ways f'm what we foller here, but I've studied on hit a heap myself; more in particular sence my own childern growed up an' married. An' I sensed hit that ef a young gal can make out to keep straight, an' has a good home, she'd better stay by hit, an' let talkin' an' marryin' be; anyhow until she's old enough an' has larned enough to spend her opinions an' have some 'tention paid 'em. The boys is all men from the time they can stan' up in a chair by the table an' glaum theirselves with a spoon; an' when a young gal marries a man she ain't axed to spend her opinions on many subjects."

"I reckon that eleven-year-old gal that mar-

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ried over on Haley Fork t'other day will git to keep all o' hern," said Almetta. "That shore wuz the youngest one I ever hyeard uv. Tilly Burton was jist thirteen though."

"Yes, they ain't many that marries at eleven er thirteen airy one; but some does, an' a whole lot goes off at fifteen, an' seventeen is the reg-erlar age. I reckon most uv 'em marries the fust one that axes 'em, an' I reckon that's what the Lord means 'em ter do; hit saves confusion. But the men oughtn't to ax little gals."

"They does though," said Almetta.

"Yes, there was my Lindy married at fifteen. She could 'er married at thirteen, though, er any time arterwards ef we'd 'a' let her, but they weren't no stoppin' 'er when she set her heart on Tom. He was a very civil, well-turned boy, Tom wuz, an' come uv a mighty well-doin' family, an' her pap wuz willin', so I had ter give in."

"Didn't yer want her to marry?"

"No, I wuz ag'in' hit on account uv her age, tho' hit suited very well, in a way, fer 'em to marry. His pap's lan' jines our'n at the top uv the ridge, an' between us we give 'em a very nice little farm. His mam an' me give 'em a plenty uv ever'thing fer the house, in the way uv beddin' and sich, an' we give 'em chickens an' seed-taters an' onions, an' ever'thing that erway; an' his pap an' Jimmy give 'em a cow an' a horse an' a pig an' a couple uv yearlin' steers. Well, betwixt us we jist give 'em the prettiest start you ever seen, jist ever'thing a body'd have any needcessity fer. I helt back

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ag'in' hit as long as I could; an' then I rech for'ard es far as I could, an' wuz in hopes they'd git along."

"An' didn't they git along?"

"Yes, they wuz mighty lovin' fer a while, an Tom stuck to her like a sick kitten to a hot hath-stone. Lindy was smart an' very managin' to her age, an' she'd do up her housework an' git out her knittin' an' set on the front porch an' knit socks fer him an' watch fer him as he passed up an' down with the log-wagon. Hit wuz pretty to see her, an' she could turn a heel like a woman. 'Peared like they thought the world uv one another too."

"What wuz the matter with 'em, then?"

"Well, they had been married about four months when her man went to dig a well. She wanted hit dug on the upper side uv the house so'st it'd be handy to the kitchen an' wash-place, but he 'lowed no, he'd dig hit on t'other side, so'st he'd have the shade to dig in in the mornin's. Hit 'peared to contrary her a sight, an' they yaggered over hit till she got plum mad an' wanted to quit him an' come home; but I told her she'd made her bed ag'in' my counsel an' now she could lay in hit accordin' to my counsel. She stormed an' cried an' 'lowed a well in the wrong place all the time would be powerful hinderin'; an' uv course she wuz right on that p'int; but she wa'n't woman enough to show him nothin' he didn't want to see."

"Did she quit him?"

"No, I partly begged an' partly made her,

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an' finally she agreed to stay. His folks wuz mighty good to her too."

"An' where did they dig the well?"

"Well, they kept on carryin' water from the spring all that fall an' winter, an' the next spring his pap tuck a switch uv witch hazel an' found water in the front yard, an' had the well dug there, very handy to ever'thing, but not where neither one uv them was contendin' fer, an' hit wuz one uv the best-sensed turns the old man ever took. He 'lowed they'd *jist let the switch settle hit*, but *he* helt the switch hisself. He 'lowed he was a master waterwitch, an' I reckon he wuz."

"Well, did Lindy an' Tom git along all right then?"

"Yes, me an' Jimmy an' his folks kind o' witched 'em along, as ye might say, tell they come to their senses an' stopped yaggerin' over little nothin's, an' when the childern begun comin' they done very well.

"Ef old folks would encourage less marryin' an' more peace, hit'd be a benefit. But hit 'pears like a heap o' folks don't pay so overly much 'tention to the childern marryin' an' quit-tin', an' some marries with the expectation uv quittin' whenever they's a mind to, an' marryin' ag'in when they gits ready."

"Like Uncle Buddy's Sissy?" said Almetta.

"Yes, pime blank like Buddy's Sissy! It 'pears to me like hit would confuse a person to have so many promises out, an' them witnessed before God an' man; an' shorely any right-minded woman'd be 'shamed to be livin' with

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one man an' 'nother one ramikin' 'round the country, likely to turn up any time. But I hears they does hit ever'wheres; down in the settlements, too, nice-appearin', high-headed women marryin' men that's knowed to have some hussy a-lawin' 'em," she added.

"Sissy married twice, an' she's left both her men an' sparks Hence Duke ever' chanct she gits. She sparked Hence before she married the first one. Folks says she'd settle down ef Hence would have her, but he won't."

"Course he won't," said Orlena.

"Well, Uncle Jake Hicky, on Dusty, has two wives at onct," said Almetta. "Ann lives aways up the branch, an' Nance lives at the mouth, an' they's jist as good to one another as they can be. Ann'll take care uv Nance's young'ns when she wants to go off to the store er a funeral meetin' er enywheres; an' Nance'll do the same by her.

"Uncle Jake buys fer 'em all, an' they all crap together. Ann is the one he's married to, an' I a little believe she's the hardest-workin', best woman uv the two an' the savinest. Nance's young'ns air the prettiest, but Ann's air the cleanest and civilest.

"Orleny, ef you wuz me would you piece a square uv this sky-blue with the snow-white?"

"No, hit looks very pretty in the hand thater-way, but them solid deep colors makes the white stand out too strong in the quilt."

"Well, that's shore to be the fact, I reckon, an' that blood red an' snow-white one I pieced yestiddy is strong enough to make a poultice,

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I'll put hit in the main top row where the pillows'll hide hit."

"Yes, that'll be all right, an' now I 'spect you'd better lay up your pieces an' put a fire in the stove fer supper, an' we'll have hit early. Jimmy an' Gran won't work late on a Sat'd'y."

"Most uv the boys won't work a-tall on a Sat'dy arternoon, ner a heap uv the men," said the girl.

"No, but Jimmy's a little workin'er than most uv 'em. I'll finish my hank before I stop, an' then you can help me set the wheel in the lower house tell Monday."

They did not cook any on Saturday for the Sabbath, but they cleared the deck of all other work.

Jimmy came in Sunday afternoon from a little rail-fence whittling meeting with some of the neighbors and reported at supper that the noration had been given out, in monthly meeting over on Talt's Fork the Sunday before, that Harrison Pate's funeral would be preached at the Pate grave P'int, on this coming Sunday, so Ans Anderson had reported.

Harrison Pate, a cousin of Jimmy's, had died, as the result of an accident, while logging, the winter before, when he and his brother-in-law were easing a great log into position to send down the chute.

It was said deprecatingly that if he had been "plum" sober the fatal accident needn't have happened, and then it was added apologetically that it had been a mighty cold spell and it was allowed that he actually needed a little some-

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thing to warm him up maybe. At any rate he had had it, and being not quite steady, as a result, had let his handspike slip, turning the log loose, just as they were rolling it over a little rise to deliver it into the chute. It had bounded, knocking the old man down, rolling over his lower extremities, and crashing off down the hill out of its proper path, just grazing another man and quite demolishing a corncrib at the foot of the hill.

Harrison Pate had married and lived and met his fate on Gabriel's Run, but had asked to be buried on the head of Hatchet Creek, among his own people. It had been a bad business, taking the body so far in winter, but Harrison had asked it.

He had lived a few days in a condition the sight of which would have moved a heart of stone; all the neighbors for miles around had seen his poor crushed limbs. They raised the quilt, gazing and speaking frankly their horror and sympathy, and calling him "the bravest man ever seen" for not complaining. In truth he was not suffering; a merciful paralysis prevented it.

A doctor was finally gotten in, late on the third day after the accident, and the old man died from the anæsthetic before the operation of removing his limbs had begun.

He had not been a particularly good man, either to his family or among the neighbors; but the case had created much sympathy and talk, and he had professed religion, and given "a sight of good counsel" on his death-bed.

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The funeral was apt to be well attended.

"I wonder what preachers they'll have?" asked Orlena.

"Why, them Mackays and Philip Gayheart air amongst 'em, I believe Ans said."

"Suze would be shore to have Philip," said Orlena.

"Hit's full early fer funerals, hain't it?" asked Gran.

"Well, I don't know. Hit's a little earlier than common, but I've knowed uv 'em being held earlier."

"Harrison's brother Bob is here from Oklahomy, I've hyeard."

"Yes, he's a wantin' his little Sammy's funeral preached before he goes back, an' he's got to go right at onct."

"Shore, that's hit," said Orlena. "They'll jist preach 'em both at onct, before he goes back."

"That little fellow died jist before they went West, didn't he?"

"Yes, I recollect Marthy's worryin' over not havin' hits funeral attended to; but they went off in sort uv a hurry on account uv her health."

"Yes. Well, Ans said Bob 'lowed this'd be a good chanct. He 'lowed Marthy'd worried about hit all along an' hit'd be a heap uv satisfaction to 'em all to have hit attended to. Ans was tellin' us about hit.

"He seed Suze about Harrison, an' they'll both be preached a Sunday."

"Well," said Orlena, "I'm glad myself, Bob's havin' little Sammy's funeral preached;

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some folks don't think hit makes much defference about a child, that erway, but I do. Hit's bad enough to have to lose 'em, with no preacher handy to speak a word an' lay 'em away—maybe under the snow, like Marthy had to lay this'n—without leavin' 'em lay an' never a word said over 'em."

The men pushed back from the table, and Almetta took her seat with Emma Jane in her lap. The child was old enough to feed herself, but she was very small and Dresden like; and Almetta preferred to make a baby of her in some ways. Orlena humored her, even to the extent of rocking her to sleep (in a chair without rockers) in the evenings, while she herself began the dish-washing.

It was still broad daylight, though the sun had dropped behind the hill, when Almetta took the child and a chair into the side-yard, and without the formality of prayer or nightie laid the drowsy child up across her bosom, with its head on her shoulder, and began rocking the chair, slowly and easily, back and forward, singing softly: "Come, thou Fount of ever-y blessing," to an old, old tune. The little lids went tight shut in a minute.

Gran came out, and dropping on the short turf of crab grass, which had been too tenacious to be swept away, sat silently until the verse was finished; and as Almetta gently lowered the sleeping child to her lap he asked with well-assumed carelessness, "Almetty, how'd ye like ter go to that funeral?"

"I might like hit very well," she said.

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“Well, then, le’s me an’ you go.”

“Naw, sir, I hain’t a-goin’ to hit; leastways, I hain’t a goin’ with you.”

The words might have been unkind, if the voice and manner had been, but there was no sting in the gentle, level tone; and Almetta seemed to be thinking of something else.

“Who air ye goin’ with, then?”

“I don’t reckon I am a-goin’ with nobody, but I’d like to go very well. I’d like to hear Philip preach again, and I never have been on Hatchet Creek; I don’t know nothin’ about that side of the river. I used to go to preachin’ with mammy an’ hear Philip when I wuz jist a leetle bit uv a gal an’ they helt monthly meetin’s on the head uv Gabriel, on the right-hand fork.”

“I ain’t never been on the head of Gabriel,” said Gran.

“Well, the settlement up there is nearly all Angels, an’ when Philip used to come over that part uv his prayer about ‘angels an’ ark angels a-passin’ an’ repassin’ an’ a-castin’ their glitterin’ crowns before the throne,’ I thought he meant Uncle Gabe’s connection, an’ that he wuz bein’ kind uv partial to Arkie, because she was the prettiest an’ a-talkin’ to his boy Jim. Hain’t childern quare?” she said.

“Yes, an’ big gals is quare too, sometimes,” he said ruefully, and after a pause, “Why won’t ye go to the funeral with me, Almetty?”

“Well,” she said, “ef ye must know, beca’s e ef we go traipsin’ around with one another, folks’ll have hit that you an’ me’s a talkin’.”

“Ay, they’ll say that anyway, ef they ain’t

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a'ready a-sayin' hit, after we've crapped together off and on all spring an' summer."

"I know hit, but as long as we don't p'intedly give 'em no call to, hit won't make no deference."

"Well, so fur as that goes," said Gran, flushing, "I'm willin' ter talk."

"I'm not," said the girl quietly, "not now, noways."

"When will ye be?" the boy urged.

"I ain't sayin' I ever will be."

There was a minute's pause before the boy continued, "Ye air defferent to most uv the gals, Almetty."

And Almetta, with woman's complaisance, said simply, "I hope so"; and with a woman's willingness to have the particulars, asked, "How?"

"Why, most uv the gals marries the fust one axes 'em."

"I hain't shore but that's what the Lord meant fer most folks to do," said the girl readily; "hit saves confusion. But a heap uv 'em is as keen to quit as they wuz to marry, an' several uv'm does quit, an' that's a sight worse'n ef they'd chanced waitin'. I aim to wait myself, an' know several things."

It was quite a chunk of wisdom for one so young; and Gran regarded her thoughtfully, and was dangerously near smiling as he asked,

"Whose idys is them, Almetty? Or did ye reason them out by yerself?"

"Well, ef they wuz anybody else's, they's

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mine now, an' I never stole 'em neither.'" She was smiling broadly.

"I reckon they wuz jist give to ye maybe."

"They mought 'a' been," said the girl, gathering Emma Jane up in her arms preparatory to rising; and as she stirred, "Bless my pretty poppet, I'm a-aimin' to make hit a little black dress trimmed in red, an' git Orleny to take me an' hit to hits mammy's fun'ral whenever they have hit preached."

"Maybe I'll git to take you to that fun'ral," called the boy after her quizzically as she walked away.

"Well, now, you mought," replied the girl, as she stepped into the house, "ef they puts it off long enough."

The boy thought ruefully of one he had attended the fall before, of a woman who had been dead twenty years. He really had some misty ideas himself along the line which Almetta had quoted so easily from Orlena, but her disappearance with the child left him lonely; and her refusal of his suit, which the turn of the conversation had led him to begin, had the usual effect of piquing his heretofore unformed desire into activity; and her manner of being independent, gently, without flaunting the quality, made her seem suddenly very, very dear and desirable. He hitched over to the chair left vacant by her and leaned his arms and head upon it. He was just a big boy after all, and away from his home and mother; and he felt the need of love. Jimmy did not occupy the same place in his life as Orlena did in the girl's.

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“Well,” he said after a while, “she never did say she wouldn’t never talk.”

Almetta had another chance that evening to go to the funeral, which she accepted as readily as she had declined Gran’s.

When she had put the child to bed and returned to the kitchen Orlena said,

“Almetty, how’d you like to go with me to that funeral meetin’ next Sunday?”

“Why, I’d jist love to go,” she replied.

“Well, don’t build on hit tell we see how things turns out, but maybe we’ll git to go.”

In a few days it was decided that they would go, and Almetta began making her plans. Gran had nothing to say about it, nor did he directly mention his growing conviction of the absolute “deference” between Almetta and all other women, but he began to attend, very regularly each evening, the ceremony of putting Emma Jane to sleep. There were no other young people to banter them; Jimmy did not care, but rather liked it, and with a man’s readiness to use everything and everybody for his own ends, began building a little plan of his own upon the probability of an ultimate marriage between them.

Orlena saw no smooth way of preventing, and had only a theoretical objection anyway, and a heart that warmed to anything that was true; and so the boy would sit on the grass feeding his heart upon the world-old picture, for which all little girls, and most women, love to pose, “The mother and child.”

Almetta, who had been liked before, was in

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no way flattered by Gran's proposal; indeed it had come up so casually that she did not think much about it, and she was in fine spirits, going to Joe's for calico and bits of finery, and Orlena had filled her cup of happiness sending to town by the postman for a "blossom hat" for her. She had sewed, and sung funeral hymns, and fetched and carried for everybody all the week, and been very happy. Gran had been very quiet, but her friendliness was very sweet to him, and his heart was full of hope. Jimmy had quietly talked his own needs in such a way that Gran could easily guess the possibilities of an advantageous arrangement for himself and Almetta, if only the girl would agree.

The following Saturday evening, the day before the memorial service for old man Harrison and little Sammy Pate, Emma Jane was not sleepy and declined to be rocked. After a few minutes of desultory talk, Gran asked with well-assumed carelessness, "Almetty, did you know they wuz a plum good little house standin' empty on the upper end of Jimmy's place?"

"In the Green Holler?" she asked.

"Yes sir, in the Green Holler, too."

"Yes, I knowed hit allers ago. Me an' Orleny went sangin' up aroun' that way onct, an' I seed hit."

"Hit's a rale pretty little place, hain't it?"

"Yes, I reckon hit's a very pretty place; I never noticed hit much."

"I wuz up that way this mornin', lookin' fer a handspike that Jimmy said had been lost up about thar some'ers last winter; an' I stopped

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at the spring fer a drink; I believe hit's the coldest water I ever drunk."

"Yes, hit's very good water," admitted the girl.

"I like to see a place handy to water that way," pursued the boy, "an' plenty of good wood clost. Hit's a mighty rich little cove thar. I axed Jimmy why he didn't have taters an' truck up thar, but he 'lowed hit were inconvenient from here."

"Yes, hit's too fur," said the girl.

"I never paid no strict 'tention to the house," he said (this was scarcely according to fact); "but hit would need a nice little porch ef anybody ever undertook to live in hit."

He paused and handed Emma Jane her doll a couple of times. She was having a little game of her own, dropping it for him to pick up.

"An' hit ought by rights to have a winder; I think ever' house ought to have a winder, don't you?"

"Yes, winders looks moughty pretty in a house, an' you can git so much good fresh air through 'em," said the girl quietly.

"Yes, an' you can have light with the door shet."

"Granny Ann used to talk uv havin' one put in both uv their houses, but Uncle Ed'ard wuz afyeard some bad luck mought happen to 'em ef they changed an old house f'm the way hit were built. He were afyeard somebody might die."

"Ay, they ain't nothin' in that; an' anyhow nobody never did live in this house an' hit ain't finished by rights; the door shetter never wuz

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hung; hit's jist a-settin' in the house ag'in' the wall."

"That house were built fer their boy John (him an' Mary Betts was talkin'); an' he died before they got married; Orleney was tellin' me 'bout hit the day we went sangin'."

"Well, now," said Gran, "that's bad. I jist pyorely love the looks uv that little house. I'd love to fix hit up an' put a palin' around hit, so'st a body could have blossoms in the yard. I jist pyorely hate to pass hit, an' hit empty."

"Maybe you'd better cross over an' go t'other way 'round," said the girl, with a quiet smile. "Hit's a very rough, steep way, but hit's safe, an' hit mought save you feelin' so bad."

"Well, I don't reckon hit'll be empty long. Jimmy was a'lowin' to-day that he reckoned he'd have to put somebody in there to look arter the fencin' an' timber on the upper end of the farm. He's got a great big boundary of land, an' a fine lot uv timber jist beyant that cove, an' somebody's been a-usin' on hit. A couple uv big oak-trees has been stole jist this last winter. He knows pime blank who stole 'em—seed the logs goin' down the creek—but he don't want to have no trouble about 'em. He said he'd make a liberal offer to somebody to tend a crap up thar, ef he could fin' the right man."

The talk was beginning to sound serious, and the girl became absolutely still and offered no remark.

Pretty sweet little Almetta, turned into fifteen, had been asked to marry more than once, but there was something here different from

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her past experiences. She had already told Orlena that Gran was different from any boy she had ever known, and his tender manner and eager face appealed strongly to her pitiful heart, but she did not want to marry. She had accepted Orlena's promise of going to school. As she remained quiet Gran continued,

"He jist as good as said he'd let a man have the Green Holler rent free, jist fer watchin' the timber an' fencin'."

He paused again, but the girl still offered no reply. He brought his gaze from the treetops on the farther side of the river to her face, and in spite of its sober look and the downcast eyes he made the proposition toward which he had been working.

"Say, Almetty, what would you say to you an' me tendin' a crap in the Green Holler next year?"

"No, I'll not tend no crap in the Green Holler," she said, gathering the child, who had suddenly dropped asleep of herself, closely in her arms and rising.

"Oh, I'd tend the crap," he said. "You wouldn't have nothin' to do but to mind Janie and the blossoms!"

"Would we take Janie?" she said.

"Why, to be shore we'd take Janie. Will ye go with me, Almetty?"

"No, Gran." A sob was rising in her throat, her voice was husky and her eyes swimming in tears.

"Don't ye like me, Almetty?"

"Yes, I like ever'body here," she whispered.

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“Don’t ye want to talk to me?” He was almost whispering himself.

“No.” The tears were running down her cheeks and she was stanching them with the baby’s dress, and her tone was very pitiful.

“Well, don’t you worry, Sugar; I’ll not pester ye. Here’s Janie’s poppet.” He picked up the doll and tucked it under the baby’s arm, saying gently, “Don’t cry, Sugar!”

## VI

### IN MEMORIAM

“WELL, you’ll not git to the funeral to-day ef ye don’t hurry,” said Jimmy, coming into the kitchen where Orlena and Almetta were dishing up breakfast. The observation was true, but, as is often the case, uncalled for, as the women were making all speed.

“Well,” Orlena replied serenely, as she slid the fried potatoes from the skillet into a meat-dish, “there’ll be plenty uv funerals ef we miss this one. Fetch a couple uv chairs off the porch, Jimmy; breakfast is right now ready. Give the bell a tap er two fer Gran, sister, an’ then lay us up some bread.”

“Is Gran goin’ ter the funeral, Jimmy?” she asked as he returned with the chairs.

“No. I don’t know what Gran’s got on his mind. I ’lowed of course he’d go, an’ offered him Beck ter ride; but he ’lowed he wa’n’t no-ways keen about funerals, an’ said ef hit were the same to me, he’d ride up about his mam’s. Said he had a few head uv stock up there he’d like to see. I told him jist to suit hisself.”

Almetta felt a twinge that she should be the cause of Gran’s missing the excursion, but said nothing, and solaced herself with Orlena’s phil-

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osophy that "there'd be plenty more funerals fer them who missed this one."

She waited upon him in a quiet but attentive way at breakfast, endeavoring to leave no doubt in his mind of her entire friendliness.

Orlena saw and guessed something of the situation, but made no allusion to his plans.

"Well, Gran," said Jimmy, as they pushed back from the table, "you mought put Orleny's saddle on the mare fer her and Almetty, an' mine on Belle; an' you kin ride Beck. Put a plenty uv blankets under the side-saddle. I'll jist step out an' look 'round the place a little. Orleny, you say Teacy Price is goin' to be here to mind the place to-day? Well, she'd better be comin' on."

Teacy came in at that minute and helped Almetta do the dishes while Orlena fed the chickens, hung a pail of morning's milk in the well to cool for supper, and herself took a look about the place. It was never left alone, and seldom without some of the family.

"Now, Teacy," said Almetta warningly, "you be shore to listen good fer Emmy Jane, an' take hit up the minute hit wakes up, an' feed hit good, God bless hits little heart! I hate to go off an' leave hit. Hit won't know what to think. I'm awful 'fyeard hit'll cry."

Almetta slept with the child in the "upper house," in Orlena's and Jimmy's room, but kept her things and made her changes, "stripped," as it was called, in the loft above. She hurried away to freshen up and put on the new things she had been preparing for the occasion; and

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was on the horse-block, ready for the start, when Gran came leading the saddled beasts around.

Her new "white-grounded" calico dress, with the black pin-stripes, had narrow bands of bright blue stitched around the collar and yoke ruffle. She wore a narrow blue ribbon sash, and a lacey round hat of light yellow thread and straw with a pink wreath around—a fragile, cheap little hat and dress; but taken with the blue of the girl's eyes and gold of her hair, made a picture that Gran made no mistake in thinking very lovely.

Hats, especially such as this one, were very scarce in the vicinity and were apt to be owned only by an occasional highly indulged oldest, or much more occasional only daughter, or some superior girl working out whom the family found it very advantageous to keep. Gran had made a point of being ready to start at the same time with the others, though in a different direction, both to avoid the appearance of being left and, as much as possible, the feeling.

He mounted at once as the others started, and it was no wonder that he had half a mind to drop his rein and let his mule take her own way, when she whinnied for her work-mate and wanted to follow, but he tightened the rein and turned her head up the river.

"I reckon none uv Jerry's folks air goin', or else they've a'ready started," said Orlena, as they passed the first house below.

"I reckon some uv 'em's went," said Jimmy.  
"Yes, I see 'em yander, jist ahead. Some uv

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Tod's folks passed down on yan side a while ago."

"I reckon they'll be several goin', apt as not," said Almetta.

"I'll inshore hit," replied Orlena, and sure enough they soon began to be joined by one neighbor and another until when they crossed the river and started up Hatchet Creek, they were part of a cavalcade, and one of the interesting features of the trip had begun.

Three months of busy work in the corn crop, following close upon the winter season, had engrossed the time and strength of the people; but a great many were about through "laying by" now, all but the "little late patches" for roasting ears, and were able and glad to accept this opportunity for stirring out.

The older people did not lose sight of the fact that the occasion was the memorializing of departed friends or acquaintances; and they rode quietly along in shifting groups, dropping behind or advancing with the chances of an ever-varying but nearly always rough road.

They spoke kindly of Harrison Pate, and all agreed that he had been a "plumb Christian-hearted man," when sober.

Little Sammy had been dead some years, but was remembered as "a mighty pyeart nice-appearin' little chap."

As among all rural peoples, the weather and crops were discussed freely, all agreeing that there had been plenty of good "seasons" and that there was a fair promise of a fine chance of corn and potatoes, "several" apples and a

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heavy mast. It had been a good farming season so far, and the prospect of a plentiful reward for their labors was all they asked.

To most of the younger people, not in the immediate families of those concerned in the service, it was frankly an outing, though a dignified one.

“Orleny,” said Almetta, “I’m plum anxious ter know where the preachers’ll leave Harrison.”

“What Harrison air ye talkin’ ’bout, Honey?”

“Why, Harrison Pate.”

“The dead man?”

“Yes.”

“Why, he’s buried on a laurel spur on the fur fork of Hatchet, an’ I ain’t hyeard no talk uv movin’ him.”

“Yes, but I want ter know where the *preachers* is goin’ ter leave ’im. You know they leave some right slap in the middle uv heaven an’ t’others that they don’t know what ter do with they leave in the hands uv the Lord.”

“Well, I hyeard that Harrison talked mighty nice before he died, an’ give ’em all some mighty good counsel, an’ said he wa’n’t nary bit afyeard ter die.”

“Yes, I hyeard that too, but I remember bein’ there one day an’ seein’ him come in drunk. He shot under Marthy’s feet an’ come in a pea uv scarin’ her to death, an’ her with a week-old baby, an’ hit don’t ’pear to me like hit would hurt to let him swinge a little.”

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"Almetty, I wouldn't handle sich talk as that 'bout a man, an' him dead, an' me dressed up a-goin' ter his funeral," said Orlena severely.

"Well, I never meant no harm, but I won't say hit no more."

"I'd shun a-thinkin' hit ef I wuz you."

"What a body thinks takes them mighty sudden at times," said Almetta demurely.

"Well, Honey," said Orlena kindly, "always try to have a Christian heart to the livin' an' speak as civil of the dead as yer can make out to."

At this point Joe Bentley, with a small boy on behind, and his wife, with a babe in her lap and Jettie behind, caught up with Jimmy and Orlena, and the woman fell in by Orlena's side.

"Well, Lizzie," said Orlena after the "how-dys" were over, "you shore have got pretty young'ns. I wuz a-noticin' 'em as I went up by to Cinthy's t'other day."

"Ay, they do very well," said Lizzie, flushing with pleasure and beginning to pull at the baby's cap and dress; and then squeezing it up to her she exclaimed, "God bless hits little heart, we ain't got but jist one boy on our place, but we think mighty high uv our gals too."

"I'll inshore hit," said Orlena, "an' I don't blame you; they air a mighty pretty passel er young'ns."

"I reckon they look well enough," said Lizzie, still trying to be deprecating, "but I git plum out o' heart sometimes studyin' on how we air a-goin' to raise 'em an' make anything out uv

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'em. Sometimes I almost druther they'd all five been boys."

"Now would you raily druther to 'a' had all boys?"

"Well, no; hit 'pears like they ain't so many chances fer gals, but they ain't so overly many fer boys neither, an' boys is a heap uv trouble. My little Ans thar is more own-wayed an' independent right now, an' him jist turned into four years old, than all five uv the gals, but hit 'pears like me ner his pap neither can't bear to contrary him airy bit."

"A heap uv folks is that erway 'bout their boys," said Orlena.

"Yes, my gals is all very civil though, an' the one on behind me here is the smartest young'n ye ever seed. She can bake as good a hobby uv bread as any woman, an' take care uv the little ones as good as I can; an' little Ans minds her better than airy other person on the place, me ner his pap neither."

"She looks smart," encouraged Orlena.

"Yes, an' I believe she could take larnin' too, ef she had the chanct. She can read in her Granny's Bible now."

"Air ye goin' ter school, Jettie," asked Almetta of the child.

"Yes, I'm aimin' ter go ef they's a good teacher."

"Have ye hyeard who they've got ter teach the school, Lizzie?" asked Orlena.

"Well, I hyeard they's a gal named Ed'ards, f'm over on Grassy, tryin' fer hit. Her folks has been livin' a way off yan-way som'ers, an'

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jist moved back to Grassy this spring. Several wants hit, but Joe 'lowed he thought they'd let the Ed'ards gal have hit like as not."

"I wonder whose gal she is?"

"Well, Joe said her mammy and pap wuz both named Ed'ards, an' her mammy wuz a sister to Tank."

"Well, I don't know which one hit could er been," said Orlena. "They wa'n't no gals in that fambly but Dovie an' Dibbie an' Sissy an' Babe; an' they ain't no school teachin' timber amongst none o' them, an' I know 'em all; they air nice gals though."

"Well, hit 'pears like most uv the schools out here don't 'mount ter nothin' noway. I reckon we can git in shape to school little Ans some way, by the time he's big enough to send off som'ers. He talks uv movin' ter town ter school 'em all, but they ain't no way fer poor folks ter live without lan', an' they say the gyardens is very small in town. His brother Jake tried hit an' had ter come back. I guess the gals will have to fare jist as I did, an' go without. I studies on hit a heap, but I don't see no remedy."

The ten-year-old girl sitting on behind her mother, resting her slim fingers lightly on the rim of the mother's saddle as the mule struggled up the steepest places, had indeed all the appearances of intellectuality guessed at by her mother; but the prospect was that this superior mind, while it would assist a naturally dignified nature in keeping to the paths of virtue, would probably bring her only to the height of her

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mother—that of being something of a philosopher on things as they were, without the possibility of bringing things to what they might be.

When the grave point was reached, most of the riders hitched their beasts in the edge of the thicket skirting the shady side of its base and joined the pedestrians, who were trooping up the path of the foothill upon whose crest one of the numerous family burying-places lay. A few men and boys, some with girls or children behind them, took a more circuitous route and rode quite up and around the point, hitching their nags behind, but at no great distance from the graves, to the swinging limbs of the forest trees. Quite a space had recently been cleared around the graves, and the two of those for whom the services were being held had been freshly spaded into a rough symmetry and decorated with “flower pots,” bunches of bright annual blossoms in cans of water.

When the Ingolds with Almetta arrived, a few men relatives and friends were still arranging seats by rolling some conveniently fallen logs into place and laying the few planks to be had across them, so that at least the mourners and older persons, and some of the women with babies, might be comfortably seated. Many sat upon the ground throughout the service and some stood. As a good deal of moving about and changing of positions was allowable, all fared fairly comfortably.

The widow, with one little girl at her side and three married daughters, each with a child in

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her lap, and Sammy's father, who was her husband's brother, had come and were already seated upon the improvised benches. The boys of the family and the older grandchildren were scattered about through the crowd.

Sammy's father sat near the end of a seat, and from time to time some old acquaintances who had not seen him since he left for the West reached a hand to him, asking in subdued voices after "Marthy" and the "young'ns," or "how the West was usin' him."

Orlena and Almetta, after greeting various friends and acquaintances by the way, took their seats on one of the planks which were filling up rapidly.

No sooner were they seated than a lean brown hand reached out from behind and plucked Orlena's sleeve. She turned, and peering into the depths of a large black sunbonnet, "Why," she said, "ef hit ain't Lindy! Why, how do ye come on, Lindy?"

"Ay, very well, I reckon. How's yerself?"

"Why, I'm as well as common. Is yer folks well?"

"Well, they's all a-stirrin' at my house, but Suze has got a moughty sick baby."

"What seems to be ailin' hit?"

"Well, hit's allers been a mighty puny little thing. 'Pears like hit don't take no start to grow, an' now hit's got the thrush, has had hit jist about what yer mought say all summer. She carried hit to ole Dave Angel to blow in hits mouth, an' hit wuz better fer a while, but hit's wus ag'in, an' Suze is talkin' 'bout takin' hit to

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that Bentley gal over on the t'other fork; she's said ter be a present kyore fer thrush."<sup>1</sup>

"Yes, I've hyeard she was; but some way er 'nother I never could seem ter see no benefit in that kind uv docterin', an' hit's moughty hot ter be carryin' a young'n so fur. How's Andy's wife?"

"Ay, she's very shabby. She follers havin' headaches right reg'lar, an' nothin' don't do her no good but doctor-medicine, an' hit's hard to keep hit all the time. Hit's costly, an' they have ter go so fur fer hit. Her oldest gal married last week."

"Now did she? Who did she marry?"

"Why, she married that oldest boy of little Ike's, a moughty well-turned, civil, workin' boy, an' his folks give 'im a heifer an' some house-plunder, an' her mam give 'em a bed an' a nice lot uv quilts, an' they've set up fer theirselves."

"Have they now? Whereabouts?"

"Why, in a little shack on his pap's land; an' they seem moughty well satisfied."

"Well, that's the main p'int in marryin'," said Orlena.

And so in whispers and low tones the exchange of information and inquiry went on, as the people continued arriving and finding places. One or two women had refreshed themselves by combing their hair with their tucking combs and fanning with their sunbonnets. It was generally agreed that the weather was very "sweltersome." A pleasant breeze sprang up,

<sup>1</sup> It is said that a posthumous person can cure thrash by blowing in the child's mouth. It is a common practice.

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and all quieted down as the preachers took their places.

A rude pulpit and bench had been erected for them under a large beech-tree, and the three ministers, with two other men to help them sing, took their places. The announcement had not been made for opening the service at a given time—the psychological moment being in general use—and so there was no snapping of watches, though there may have been more than one timepiece in the assembly!

After a little while one of the ministers began a chanting—very low and apparently unplaced—but as the singer found the pitch and was joined by his comrades, the chanting swelled into one of those weird funeral hymns of the back woodsmen, so rich in minor chords and so absolutely impossible to reproduce in written music. After a few hymns, sung almost entirely by the men, with an occasional woman's voice piping in shrilly, one of the ministers made a short prayer and Enoch Mackay came forward and read his text: "We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground," from a small, thick, leather-bound Bible.

Enoch had been a "bad man" in his younger days, but had been suddenly sobered, in a number of ways, by falling from his horse one bitter cold day into a swollen river. As he was going down the third time he had hastily consecrated the very hypothetical "remainder of his life" to the service of God. Statistics have shown that usually the brand of religion gotten "between the roof and the ground" is not "lasty,"

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but Enoch's had been. Indeed, Enoch had always been more than less a man of his word; and the keeping of his pledges had wrought ill on more than one occasion before; but when he had been rescued, rolled upon a barrel and toasted back to life, he not only remembered his hasty promise and the dire sensations which had caused it, but he was really a thankful, repentant sinner.

He had learned to read a few chapters in the Bible (by faith, it was reputed), and had become thenceforward a very acceptable preacher, having one sermon, the important and intelligible part of which related to his own life and conversion. He delivered this discourse with slight variations six or eight times a year, in connection with any one of two or three texts, at memorial services or "monthly meetings" (not always held monthly by any means).

Many of those present were thoroughly familiar with this discourse. There were men present, past middle life, who had been touched by it in young manhood; but the listening part of the congregation paid apparently close attention for an hour. And if the experience had lost its first thrill in the often telling, it was realistic still; and the declaration that he "soused down into that water a lost sinner and roused up a saved man" was still convincing, and the spirit's witnessing with the simple, honest man had often made it convicting. More than one person present had gotten right with God through the old man's ministry, Orlena herself being one.

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His delivery was rather free from the mannerisms which marked many of his brethren. He did not hold his ear as he spoke and did not spit often. He began his sermon, after the usual preliminary of asking indulgence for himself and of the reading of the text, with some personal allusions to the dead for whom the service was being held.

After announcing the name and date of birth and death of each, he went on to speak of his hope for them. For Brother Harrison his hope was strong. He himself had been converted under similar circumstances to those in which Brother Harrison had lost his life, and Brother Harrison's last gasping confession had been satisfactory. Little Sammy, of course, was safe, having been called away an innocent child. Enoch was no "hardshell."

He preached for an hour. This necessitated a good deal of repetition, but nothing else would have answered, especially for the first speaker of the day.

Men much less respected than Enoch, and with little more to say, had been listened to for three hours—by relay congregations for the most part, it is true.

After the sermon he sang in a quavering but well-sustained voice: "Come and lie with me in the old churchyard," and taking his seat on the rude slab bench gave way to Brother Philip Gayheart.

Philip Gayheart was a little above medium height, slender and somewhat stooped, with a face rather dull in repose but which lighted up

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from time to time, as he preached, with the fires of mysticism. Threadbare and collarless like his co-laborers, but neat and clean, he rose from among them and advanced quietly.

“Brethren and sist’reen,” he began in an even tone, which though low and conversational was so clear that the most careless of the young people on the edge of the congregation heard plainly, “you know my manner of life an’ my manner uv preachin’. I don’t come to you with no enticin’ words uv men’s wisdom. I have very little l’arnin’, an’ am jist a humble, sinful man, not a-pretendin’ to be better than nobody else. But I have managed by a very hard way to l’arn to read the Scriptures, an’ I have read ’em an’ studied ’em considerable an’ the Sperrit has led me from time to time to rise among my neighbors an’ frien’s an’ give ’em the benefit uv my studiens, an’ what light the Sperrit has shed into my pore, weak, sinful, an’ sinnin’ heart.

“Whilest I wuz a-settin’ here awhilest ago a-listenin’ to our Brother Mackay a-preachin’ on ‘the water spilt upon the ground’ an’ a thinkin’ uv Brother Harrison and little Sammý an’ all them that has passed an’ gone, whose vessels of life has been turned bottomside up, a-spillin’ the water accordin’ to the text, hit ’peared as if a great vision come into my heart uv hit all bein’ drawed up ag’in, an’ a-comin’ drap by drap into the great eternal ocean of life, an’ nary drap a missin’. An’ that fetched into my mind the great invitation that wuz give to the marriage supper uv the Lamb, where all wuz invited an’ had the chanct to come.

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Brother Harrison and little Sammy, I have the confidence to believe, has accepted that great invitation an' has sot down to the feast.

"You know, brethren an' sist'ren, the Scriptures tells us uv how the Good Old Man give a marriage supper and sent his servants to ax all the people to come in an' eat uv the supper an' rejoice with 'em. But hit 'peared to be the main busy time with the whole settlement, an' 'they all begin with one accord to make excuses.' One of 'em had bought him a piece uv ground, an' another one a yoke uv oxen, an' another one had married a wife.

"Yes, yes, brethren! a quare lot uv excuses they made, along uv the land an' the cattle an' the women!"

The speaker's resonant tones rose, his utterance became rapid, his countenance kindled, as he dwelt upon the petty excuses of the careless and the strivings and cravings of the world which kept them back from the communion with their Lord.

"No, no!" he cried, "they wouldn't come! The servant give the word: 'All things are now prepared; come, fer the supper is ready,' 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,' come, all ye hungry, cravin', sinful, jealous-hearted, envyin' sinners, all things are now ready! Yes, brethren, all things are now prepared!"

It was a piercing cry now, and for some moments as he continued the utterance became so rapid, the reiteration so frequent, the sentences so broken, that all that was intelligible to the

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listening people was the "voice in the wilderness" with its warning cry, and the uplifted, mystic face of the preacher as he reached this ecstatic climax with strained eyes, looking afar into the blue between the boughs of the still green leaves.

But in an instant his whole voice and manner changed, his countenance lost the look of the visionary, his piercing gaze softened and his eyes met, with a normal consciousness, the wistful faces of his hearers as his voice dropped into the low, musical tone of the prelude, and he continued quite simply and intelligibly, "'But they all began to make excuse,' jist like a heap uv you'ns is doin' to-day, out here on this mountain p'int, with the graves uv them that has gone before all around, a-warnin' ye that they is a summons comin' that ye can't shun, whether ye goes willin' er unwillin', whether ye has a warnin' er a lay-wayin'. The time when ye can set back an' refuse invitations is a-passin' fast, an' one uv these days an' times a voice is a-goin' ter say, 'Come!' an' ye air a-goin' ter rise an' go. Me an' these brethren that is here to-day a-counselin' an' a-reasonin' with ye, can't make ye answer any more than Sister Suze can call back Brother Harrison, ner than Brother Robert here can git a return whisper from little Sammy."

Here the preacher's voice took on the gentlest, most winning tone as he said, "Hit wuz a mighty good child to mind, little Sammy wuz, an' quick ter answer."

He paused, and stepping toward the smaller

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grave, leaned over it lightly and called softly, as one would waken a beloved sleeping child, "Sammy! O, Sammy!" and then louder, in listening attitude, "O Sammy!" and then with a puzzled look he said, "Hit wuz sich a good chile ter answer," and lifting his voice in a rising wail he called again and yet again, listening with bowed head and uplifted hand.

Little Sammy had looked but a sleeping child, with a flush upon his round cheeks, when they had placed him in the white-lined box, after the short, losing struggle with croup, which takes such deadly toll of the children in the mountains; but it had been years ago, the sleep was too deep, and the cry of the preacher reached only the hearts of the weeping father and friends.

He turned to them and said quietly, "I can't hear nothin' but the least rustle uv departing footsteps on a furrin shore. Little Sammy has been called out uv the reach uv earthly voices, by One who is bound to be obeyed, and, brethren and sist'ren, they's a call seasonin' fer ever' one uv us!

"The dead all around us to-day are a-warnin' us; an' down over these valleys, a-shinin' over the good craps and plentiful provisions, is the smilin' sunshine uv heaven, sayin', 'Come, fer all things are now prepared,' and ye are settin' here makin' excuses.

"An' they's preachers right here in these mountings a-tellin' ye that they hain't no sin, no sperritual death, ner no hell.

"In face uv the Good Book's sayin' in one

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place, 'Come, ye blessed,' an' in the t'other, 'Depart, ye cursed,' ye air still makin' excuses. Oh, my brethren an' sist'ren, what about the like uv that?"

Again he was swinging along with mellifluous tones and swinging grace-notes: "Open one uv these graves at your feet, an' see what sin an' death has done to the mortal body uv a man, an' after you have a-gazed on that parable uv speritual death, listen to the voice uv the Prince uv Life a-callin', 'Come, fer all things air now prepared'; an' ef you've the sperrit uv a man in you, arise an' come, a-washin' away yer sins."

The sermon lasted perhaps an hour. The speaker, with a voice and a native genius for oratory, carried his audience with him into the realms of feeling, playing frankly and skillfully upon their emotions. The high wailing tones of his voice reached the key that many of their natures were built upon and drew tears from many an eye, while the sudden transitions to the easy conversational style had a fine oratorical effect and convinced the hearers that he, at least, understood himself, whether they did or not. The really valuable parts of his discourse were in these lulls between the frenzied heights.

Philip's doctrine contained nothing peculiar to himself, but was a simple acceptance of The Book as it is written, and his preaching was mainly confined to a few simple statements of Jesus' life and work as he found it in the Gospels.

He had two or three sermons which answered

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for monthly meetings or funerals, with slight variations. On funeral occasions the last words of the deceased, with the statement of the person's perfect willingness and preparedness to go, were almost universally given, and from time to time some personal allusion to the deceased was woven into the discourse.

Philip was followed immediately by Chillion Mackay, a distant relative of Enoch's. He was recognized as rather a weak imitator, and believed by many to be a hypocrite. He was a rambling, mournful, unedifying preacher, shaggy and soiled looking. His doleful cadences rose and fell rather hopelessly on the ears of an audience already beginning to feel the effects of a long service.

His efforts to reach the ecstatic were lame. He had all the mannerisms peculiar to many of the preachers. He held one ear incessantly and spat often. The burden of his sermon was the "needcessity" of taking life seriously and mourning much.

"You gals an' boys," he said, "air seein' pleasure an' enjoyin' life now! Hit's mighty nateral; but hit's mighty sinful! I used ter see pleasure an' enjoy life, too, but now I've found Jesus, I don't enjoy life any more!"

The younger element to whom this was addressed, always undependable listeners, after the announcement of his old, familiar text, had begun moving out and away, in greater numbers than usual and were enjoying life and each other's society, sitting about on mossy stones or fallen logs or grassy spots, making love rather

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openly, and a few holding hands, before he had gotten well into his harangue.

Almetta had found her brother Sid, and they were away off up the point together, talking earnestly. A number of the older persons had stepped quietly aside from time to time, and even Uncle Gabriel Angel had deserted after Philip had finished. He and an old crony of his found comfortable lodging on the ground under the shade of an ironwood-tree, with their backs against a great boulder which had been brought thus far and left, by some creeping glacier in ages past. As Uncle Gabriel made a row of careful notches in a piece of pawpaw sapling with an old pocket-knife, his companion with equally painstaking care peeled rings about another and they discussed the comparative merits and abilities of the preachers, agreeing that "Philip was a master hand to preach."

"Chillion can't hold the light fer Philip to preach by," said Uncle Gabriel, putting a careful notch in the soft wood.

"No, mate!" agreed his companion, as he started a new ring upon his stick, and added, looking away off down the hill, where a couple of men, just out of sight of the preachers, were exchanging saddles,

"I reckon them fellows has shore swapped horses."

When Chillion had shouted and scolded himself hoarse, Philip and one of the men sang: "There is a green hill far away without a city wall," to a charming old tune abounding in sudden drops into minor chords; and the company

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gathered back for the closing of the service. Philip spoke briefly but feelingly of the sorrows and trials of the widows and orphans and of the father who had been called upon to give up his son. He asked that all present who were willing to pray for them, in their loneliness and struggles, would signify it by coming forward and giving them and him the right hand of fellowship. Most of the women who were not pil-  
lowing more than one sleeping child, and a number of men, went forward.

Orlena did not weep as easily as some, but her eyes were misty as she joined in the general expression of sympathy. The widow was weeping quietly. The little girl had slipped away and joined her playmates but the three older girls were sobbing aloud.

The congregation resumed their places, and Philip asked the brethren to select another hymn, and "opened the doors of the church," asking all who were willing to give up their sinful "carares," and accept the great invitation, to come forward during the singing. There was no response to this, though Almetta wanted to go and looked very wistful, while a number looked guilty and some endeavored to hide real concern behind forced smiles.

After this Enoch Mackay arose and said that before parting for the day there was a little matter he thought should be brought up. Brother Gayheart, he said, had been going in and out among them for many years, preaching their funerals and holding monthly meetings from place to place; that he had had sickness in

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his family all the spring, and had fallen behind some and was needing a little help to pay his taxes; that while he himself, as little as any man, believed in charging for a free gospel, and set as little store by these learned preachers in stiff collars that took money for it, still Brother Gayheart deserved help; and if a couple of the brethren would take their hats and go among the people for a little collection, it would only be just and right.

Philip was well liked; his needs were known, and a number of small contributions were made and rather apologetically received by Philip. Enoch then made the announcement of a number of funerals in different localities and a baptizing, and dismissed the congregation. It was quite into the afternoon but except for some small children, who had been fed pieces of ginger-cake or apples carried in small satchels by their mothers, no one appeared to think of dinner nor be inconvenienced by the lack, and very few accepted the urgent invitations to near-by places.

The majority of those from a distance were very soon on the homeward road, riding or "taking nigh cuts" walking, as the case might be; and the funeral was over for this year at any rate.

One service was usually allowed sufficient for memorializing the dead, but they were sometimes held oftener. All agreed that it had been a very pretty funeral.

The homeward way was taken at rather a brisker pace and with less conversation than

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the morning trip; but as Orlena's horse with its double load dropped somewhat behind Jimmy, Lizzie Benton, their companion of the morning, joined them.

"I seed several couples holdin' han's at the funeral," Almetta remarked, after a pause.

"Yes, an' ef ye go back in a year er two, ye'll see some uv them same gals holdin' young'ns—some with rightful daddies an' some without; but hit'll be a new crap holdin' hands," said Orlena sententiously.

"Hit's the Lord's truth," said Lizzie Benton, who was troubled about her own young sister, who had been one of those holding hands. "An' I do wish they wuz somethin' more fer the gals ter do between corn-hoein' and fodderin'. A body can't patch scraps all the time."

The older women continued a desultory conversation, and Almetta fell silent and found herself watching for home across Orlena's shoulder. They were soon there now, and it was a very pleasant coincidence to her that Gran should come riding up to the block from the other direction as she and Orlena approached.

He rode quite briskly, as if in fear of being late, but Orlena, long familiar with every twist and turn and possible outlook of the road, remembered the bunch of young white-oaks at the upper turn above the house, behind which a person might linger, unobserved, viewing the approach for some distance below the house, and she had her own ideas as to the opportuneness of Gran's arrival; but there was no be-

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trayal of her thought, either in her face or manner, as she said heartily, "Hit shore wuz," when Almetta, sliding to the ground assisted by Gran, said happily "how nice it was fer them all ter happen home together."

## VII

### ALMETTA'S SCHOOLING

SCHOOL was about to begin, and Almetta Angel matured her plans for attending. Orlena said she might have the small tin pail, which was blessed with a tight lid, for a dinner bucket. She hunted up and washed a bottle for milk, and Gran whittled a stopper for it from a cob.

Jimmy was going up to "town," and when approached by Almetta to know if he would bring her books, readily agreed, having a mental picture of a blue-back speller and possibly a nickel slate. When she calmly asked for a Fifth Reader, a big geography, and a spelling-book he was aghast, and expostulated earnestly, not so much over the advancement of the books as the number and expense. Why not, he argued, have one at a time and learn all that was in it before incurring the expense of others that one might never live to need? He had been to school himself, he averred, and had seen the day when he could spell every word in the blue-back speller, and he knew, "as well as he wanted to," that one book at a time was enough.

Jimmy really knew better than this, as he had taken an interest in the school himself when his own children were going. He had always been

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a trustee in those days, and looked out for good teachers. Orlena had stained a blackboard with oak ooze, and their children had learned to write and figure. One of their boys could bound and give the capitals of all the states, and give the names and dates of all the Presidents and every rule in the grammar.

Almetta with unexpected firmness insisted upon the selection of books. Orlena herself doubted the wisdom of getting them so advanced, but came to her assistance by saying that she had promised the girl "what she thought she would need," and if "them wuz them," why, "Almetty was a good girl and had yearned them, and she was not goin' to see her misput about 'em."

Jimmy was somewhat a stickler for his own word, and being fairly caught, grumblingly agreed to fetch them. It was an added cause of ferment to him, however, when the geography would not go in the saddle-pockets and had to be carried by hand. He would have thrown it away once if he had not paid "good money" for it.

Gran had felt an envious tug at his heart over these preparations of Almetta's, but he was a man now, nineteen, and tall and strong, and had long realized that his education, begun so auspiciously on the "Roaring Fork" under "Miss Sally" had also ended there, so far as attendance upon school was concerned.

To those lads whose forebears chose the mountain wildernesses in the days when deer and wild honey were plentiful, Father Time brings op-

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portunity for little else than the grappling with nature for a place upon the bosom of Mother Earth in these latter days of bacon and sorghum.

Nearly everybody of Jimmy's and Orlena's generation had gone to school some; though a month or so had been the whole term for many. A few days even had been enough to prove to many a full-blooded lad or lassie that "books in running brooks" were of much more vital interest than book-learning.

With a few exceptions the little learned by the older people had soon been lost. Some who now made their marks in the transference of deeds had long ago read in the Second, or even Third Readers, but there was nothing to read and no incentive, and even that meager beginning had been lost. Of those who could read, many could not write or tell numbers, as there had not been, nor yet were, appliances for writing in most of the schools of the section.

On the other hand, there were young folk who could scarcely read print at all, yet could read a letter in the crudest writing and answer it in kind. This was not scholastic learning. Most of these were love letters.

Even in Gran's and Almetta's day four or five months' close attendance under a faithful teacher, who had a working knowledge of the rudiments, and who did not dismiss the school upon the slightest pretext, was quite unusual; and the majority of the children in the far country districts were growing up in pathetic ignorance.

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Nearly all of these rural schools were formally dismissed for a week or two weeks, for "fodder-in'," and many of them remained informally dismissed for weeks. Some never resumed, as cold weather would set in finding the school-houses lacking parts or all of their heating apparatus.

Whose affair it is to be foresighted and attentive to the windows, roofs, stoves, etc., of mountain district schools has never been generally determined. Of course a teacher could not be required to teach in a cold schoolhouse, but he could, and usually did, draw his pay for the weeks, sometimes months, during which the school was unkept and the responsibility unplaced.

Gran's Miss Sally, during that memorable term on the Roaring Fork, had created a sensation, not only by declining to dismiss for foddering, but also by herself buying and putting up a stovepipe to the rusty old stove which had not been used for two years; and during foddering-time and the following week, when only slender attendance drifted back, taught Gran and the few faithful ones to write and tell figures.

Gran treasured his knowledge, reading what scraps came into his hands, and kept a pencil and a "day-book" in his Sunday coat pocket. In his day-book he entered his business items, such as the day on which he set in to work for a man and the wages agreed upon; the date of his own birth, with his full name, the addresses of friends in the army, the lines of a few old ballads, and such odd bits as seemed of enough

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importance to record. He meant, if he was ever the head of a house, to take the county paper. He once had lived at a place where it had been taken, and he felt the interest and added dignity of the custom.

When Almetta's preparations stirred the old longings, Gran merely whittled a new point on his pencil, wrote carefully a few more items in his day-book, by way of self-assurance, and dismissed the matter with the further consolation, that "apt as not the teacher didn't know nothin' nohow."

As to this Orlena had been correct in saying that "there was no teachin' timber among Tank Ed'ards' people"; but it was nevertheless a fact that Dibbie's daughter, Armilda, had secured the school at the mouth of Big Gabriel.

Armilda Edwards was a rather good-looking girl, with the kind of manner and bearing referred to as "still." This stillness was at a premium in young women, signifying dignity, and often supposed to accompany ability.

She had been three months, one winter, to "town" to school, and held a second-class certificate, which she had obtained with little trouble at the last examination before the election, along with some others equally unprepared.

The county superintendent was one of those "children of this world, who are in their generation wiser than the children of light," and he had been re-elected by a snug majority, receiving the votes of Tank and his three sons, among those of other interested parties.

Besides her good looks and dignity of bearing

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and the town advantages, Armilda was a good dresser, in spite of the pins which so often frankly occupied positions which should have been held by buttons. More sure, however, than all these so manifestly suitable qualifications to win her a school was a certain disposition she had to hold one, even though the expense of obtaining it would reduce her part of the "draw" to a minimum.

She did not intend to put much into the school, and if what she actually came out with was little, "it was that much," as she said in her quiet way, and wisely considered that sitting out the session in a schoolhouse for little was better than sitting at home for nothing.

So few children went to a school, and so little came of it, that the opening of those institutions caused little stir in the communities; but the region is so large, the districts so numerous, the population so dense, that those burning midsummer mornings measured time for thousands of children who pattered their barefoot ways up and down the steep mountain-sides, over the rough beds of creeks and branches, through the deep sands of the "river roads" or along the smooth, hard, well-shaded, and altogether delicious by-paths to little old unfurnished schoolhouses, in many of which the spelling of mispronounced words was still the chief exercise of the day.

Here and there a conscientious teacher, strong of intellect, kind of heart, and honest of purpose, ran a handicap race with the ignorance of some community. For his trophy, perhaps some

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leader of men was developed, who soon found his way out and away where leaders were wanted.

All honor to those teachers, and to the very rare good schoolhouse, which showed the high-water mark of intelligence for some region; and all honor truly to the fine intellects found in all these regions which have survived such long neglect of bookish things.

There were sixty-three persons of school age in the Lower Gabriel Run district. Of these, four were married, one was a cripple, and two were simple. Two were not allowed to go on account of minding babies, and one was minding her granny. Two were kept at home to hunt the cows up, eight were working for themselves, and ten lived too far from the schoolhouse to attend. There were thirty-three without any excuse for not attending, besides Almetta and Gran, who had been enrolled in other districts. Gran belonged to the class of regular workers, but Almetta was going.

She had no very well-defined purpose of ever being a teacher, (the highest ambition of most of those who "took to books"); but stirring in her heart was a tiny flame of ambition for better things, when she laid the Fifth Reader and spelling-book side by side upon the big geography, and taking up the dinner pail, stepped out into the white light of a late summer morning.

Already the burning hot days and cool nights, with a soil conducive to early maturing, were touching up the leaves and setting crimson signals for approaching fall along the road among

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the sassafras, sumac and dogwood. Here and there in shadowy places a finger of five-leaved ivy glowed deep red among its dark green mates. Smooth yellow leaves floated down from the tall poplars, or crinkled brown ones from the white-bolled sycamores.

In the corners of the worm fences the leafless yellow love-vine, with its bunches of tiny waxy flowers, rode its tangling, straggling way indiscriminately over stick-tight weeds or touch-me-nots, the lovely jewel-weed; and goldfinches were swinging on the yellow mullen stalks, finding dry seeds even among the blossoms.

The girl took her way happily along with no thought of these signs of early maturity, but only feeling how beautiful it all was, how glad she was to go to school, how good was Orlena, and how she hated to leave Emma Jane. She wondered one minute if Gran disliked her going to school; another if she would ever marry him; and another if by slipping ever so easily, she could catch a humming-bird in a trumpet-flower.

Bill Price's was the only house between Jimmy's and the school, and Heppy was on the fence as Almetta came by. She was fond of this queer little girl and had started early on purpose to ask her to go to school.

Little black-haired, brown-skinned, blue-eyed Heppy had come into the world with a short crooked leg. Her father had been killed before she was born, and the mother had died a few days after the tiny cripple had been laid in her arms.

It was a sordid little world the child had come

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into, thus handicapped, but she had always seemed happy enough. She had gotten religion and insisted upon being baptized at the unheard-of age of ten years, after hearing Philip Gayheart preach his great sermon on "The Two Roads." It was a wonderful sermon, full of the imagery of Revelation, which the preacher took quite literally.

Everybody, even Philip, had been opposed to the delicate little cripple being baptized so young, but he had gone down into the river with the white-faced, clinging child, and burying her in its limpid depths had stumbled back up the bank, blinded by his own tears, and handed her into the first arm outstretched to receive her.

That very night her uncle and a strange man had come in at dark; they had been playing cards together in the other house when the woman and child went to bed and the woman to sleep. The next morning there was blood spattered on the floor of the other house. Her uncle and the strange man were gone never to return, and Heppy was tossing in fever and prating from Philip's sermon of "the two roads and the angel with the flaming sword, who 'minded the gate, and turned many back."

Philip never preached the sermon again, but Heppy quoted broken sentences from it ever after, and gained the reputation of being a prophetess. She was not simple-minded—far from it—and would have gone to school but for her lameness.

Almetta Angel and Hepzibah Ingold, called Heppy, were both descended from Flora Angel's

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twins, and dark, and fair like them, they had qualities of mind and heart brought down from them. Almetta paused and gave Heppy the bunch of blossoms she had picked, and asked her to go to school with her, telling her that there was lots of time and that the road was not very rough. Heppy, who was not very well, replied that "There was two roads," and Almetta perceiving that she was in a "quare" spell, passed on.

Teacy Price and her little Joe were at the barnyard gate, turning their cow out on the road to graze, as Almetta passed and asked, "Ain't yer goin' ter let Joe go to school with me to-day, Teacy?"

"Naw, I reckon he can't go to-day," said Teacy. "He'll have to stay an' help mammy keep the cows minded out'n the field, I reckon."

"Ain't none uv the young'ns goin'?"

"No, I reckon not. We ain't hardly in shape to send 'em," said Teacy, as she dragged the rickety old gate to.

"Well, be ready to go home with me as I go back," said Almetta politely, as she started off.

"I reckon I couldn't go to-day," said Teacy. "You better come in a while."

"No, I'll be goin' on."

Almetta marched on and into the little school-house on the knoll under the big beeches with her impressive arm-full of new books; and Pepper's Mary, who had sharp eyes—also sharp tongue and other sharp traits—and no books at all, promptly sat down beside her on the rickety slab-seat.

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Pepper's Mary was neat and thrifty, and had a decided predilection for clean, new books. She was a natural reader and classified herself from year to year, according to the condition of the books present and the agreeability of their owners. She had read in the Fourth Reader two years ago and in the Third last year, and now she and Almetta would be together in her nice new Fifth.

It proved to be a very pleasant arrangement for Almetta, as Pepper's Mary, having nothing much to do and being thrifty, whispered the lessons over in stage whispers three or four times daily, slipping her sharp little finger along under the words as she read, while Almetta held firmly to her side of the book, whispering after her, and occasionally digging her with her elbow and whispering sharply, "Don't read so fast, Mary!"

Many of the lessons were read in concert, making smooth sailing for everybody, and except for an unexpected event Almetta would have gone through the book learning very little. The spelling lessons came twice and sometimes three times a day, and here Almetta took her place according to her ability.

For the big geography, Armilda Edwards calmly announced, they had no use. This seemed a great pity to Almetta, and she continued for weeks to carry it back and forth with her. She would sit turning the pages wistfully, looking at the pictures of cities, railroads, and steamboats, the products of various countries, and the races of men; but best and strangest

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of all were the friendly millennial groups of animals, reptiles and birds at the beginning of chapters. If the lion was not positively "lying down with the lamb," there were other groupings quite as indicative of natures held in abeyance.

Almetta looked and wondered.

One day she carried the book out to Armilda at recess, as she sat under the beeches, and asked the meaning of some of the maps and figures. Armilda, who was no fool at all, and really knew a good deal more than she had any intention of trying to teach, told her that the world was round.

"You know hit ain't!" had been Almetta's wondering interjection.

But Armilda read her some conclusive sentences from the book and explained the illustrations. Almetta listened and looked earnestly, and after a long breath, which was almost a sigh, of pure content, she acknowledged,

"Shore hit's bound ter be round!" and never doubted more.

That evening as she came up the path with a brimming bucket of milk, Almetta met Gran coming down. The great round moon was coming up over the "low gap" through a silhouette fringe of brush. They paused, and Almetta asked,

"Gran, did you know that old yaller moon was a-surroundin' us ever' day?" and as he only looked at her quietly, continued, "Did yer know the world wuz round?"

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

Gran had heard this, but capriciously chose to be noncommittal.

“Who said she were round?”

“Why, Armildy Ed’ards said she were.”

“Has Armildy ever been *around* her?”

“No, she hain’t.”

“Well, sight’s what kyores the blind.”

“Well, I seed the picter, and the book said she were round,” she said triumphantly.

“Shucks, the book mought be wrong.”

This was quite absurd. Who ever heard of a *book being wrong*? She suddenly realized he was teasing her, and giving him a pitying look, she changed the pail to the other hand and proceeded on her way, flinging back over her shoulder, “You couldn’t law larnin’ onto some folks.”

When Jimmy finally discovered that the book was not in use at school he declared it was a shameful waste.

He was mistaken. Was it not worth the price to know the world was round?

There were twenty-three children coming the first week of school, and various interests kept the greater number of them faithful for two or three weeks; but it had soon come to be pretty generally understood that the teacher was “no stake” either for discipline or teaching. The number in attendance had dropped down to ten. Even Almetta was contemplating stopping, when she walked into school one morning and found a strange man setting the benches in order, and perceived that they had a new teacher.

## ALMETTA'S SCHOOLING

He briefly announced that he and Armilda had agreed to swap schools. This was often done in these districts and was accepted with little comment. No one even asked why they had swapped and the Lower Gabriel Run school certainly lost nothing by the change.

It was soon understood that they had a "right" teacher now in Jerry Taulbee, and the drift set back toward the school, a number of children from other districts coming in.

The pieces of the old blackboard which Orlena had stained with ooze years ago were gotten down from the loft and patched together, and even the physiology chart, required by law, was brought into some small use.

Almetta was tactfully placed in the third reader, and studied her lessons with Jettie Bentley. School life became a thing of joy and interest.

One evening Almetta came home all excitement, exclaiming,

"Orleny, you'd never guess who's comin' to school!"

"Not Heppy Ingold, I reckon?"

"No, not Heppy, not by a bushel."

"Well, who then?"

"Pyorly Sid!" she said with vehement joy. "He hyeard what a good teacher we had, an' he's aimin' to come all the time."

"Hit's a right smart walk fer him, ain't hit?"

"Yes, hit's all uv three mile, but he wuz two mile from the upper school, an' we got away yander the best teacher. Orleny, Sid's smart, an' he's pretty, too."

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

"Yes, Sid's a very smart, well-appearin' boy."

"I hope him an' the teacher gits along, but he used to be very independent an' ill, when he was crossed airy bit."

"Would he fight?"

"Ay, man, he'd fight too," said Almetta, settling herself on the edge of the porch, in reach of the great pile of beans Orlena was threading up to dry. "But he wuz plum tender-hearted when he wuz havin' his own way, though I wouldn't allers let him have hit," she said, filling her lap and settling to the work.

"Did you fight him back?"

"Yes, me an' him fit right reg'lar."

"Did yer mammy 'low ye to fight?"

"No, but she followed goin' off to work an' leavin' us. I remember onct we wuz a-livin' 'way on the head uv Clifty, an' mam bought me a little hat from Red Ike Ingold. He used to keep goods on the head uv the creek. I thought moughty high uv my little hat, an' I 'member pime blank how hit looked. Hit was a little round straw hat, white an' blue pided, with a blue band around the crown.

"Mam had hired me with hit to drink Indian hemp tea fer the rheumatiz that spring, when I had waded the creek in Feb'uary. Hit's the bitterest brew they is, I reckon, but hit'll shore kill rheumatiz.

"Well, ever time Sid'ud git mad at me he'd threaten of tearin' up my little hat. One day mam went off some'rs to work an' Sid got mad at me an' throwed hit out in the wet weeds. I

## ALMETTA'S SCHOOLING

never spoke a word ner never let on that I cared. I sa'ntered out an' got hit an' hung hit out uv his reach an' come on out a singin', 'I'm goin' ter jine the army, I'm goin' ter volunteer.'

"Sid wuz jist a-standin' there on the aidge uv mam's backer-patch. I made as if I wuz a-goin' on by, but jist as I passed him I whirled and yoked him around the neck an' we clinched. I wa'n't but jist strong enough to hold him. I was afyeard to let him git fur 'nough away to draw a rock on me, so I jist helt him and squeez him.

"Well, sir, we wrastled all over that backer-patch. We jist finaciously ruint hit, an' mam skinned us both when she come home; but I nearly squeez the life out'n him an' made him quit kickin' an' beg before I loosed my holts.

"He promised he'd never tech that hat ag'in while he trod dirt an' wouldn't tell mammy I squeez him; but when I drapped him and looked at that patch, I knowed in reason they wa'n't no tale to tell that ud put hit back like hit belonged, an' I didn't like to lie nohow."

"An' so yer mam whooped ye both?"

"She whooped us too."

"Well, ef I wuz you I'd talk to Sid an' counsel 'im to study hard an' try to please the teacher an' do what he tells 'im first off, an' not raise no argyments with 'im. He's a good teacher an' a very nice-appearin' man; but they don't nobody seem to know nothin' about 'im ner where he come from, and what you don't onderstan' you better let be.

"Some says his name ain't even Taulbee, but

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

hit's what he calls hisself, an' hit's none uv our business, an' I'd say nothin' 'bout that neither. The least said the soonest mended. Has he ever made any pass at talkin' to any uv you gals, Almetty?"

"No, I reckon not. Sid axed me that day at the funeral, when me an' him went off up the p'int, ef anybody'd ever said anything to me that I didn't like. He says as yearnest, 'Almetty, ef anybody ever bothers you, you tell me, an' I'll set in the bushes tell I shoot 'em.' I scolded him fer handlin' sich talk."

"That won't do, Almetty, an' don't you never let on to him about anythin' that bothers you, and counsel him to be peaceable."

"Speakin' uv talkin', Orleny, that gal, Pearl White, that we seed at the funeral, has started in to school. Did I ever tell you how mad she made me that day?"

"No, I believe not."

"Well, you seed her an' that chuffy, red-faced Sam Willis a-holdin' hands, didn't ye?"

"Yes, I seed 'em."

"Well, I never seed the gal before, though I knowed the boy, an' just 'lowed they wuz talkin', f'm the actions they wuz a-havin'."

"Ondoubtedly, I reckon," agreed Orlena.

"Well, Sam's horse broke loose while they wuz takin' up the collection for Philip, or least-ways he let on hit had, an' went an' jerked at hit, an' made hit cut up some, an' took an' hitched hit to another limb. I couldn't see nothin' wrong with the nag myself; I come right down by hit, as me an' Sid come off'n the hill jist a

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few minutes before, an' hit wuz jist a-standin' there on three legs, sorter dozin', an' I jist 'lowed to myself that he wuz aimin' ter shun the collection, an' actin' like that old clay bank wuz too gaily."

"Apt as not," said Orlena.

"Well, while he wuz off tryin' to make his horse cut up, that gal, Pearl, she come a-edgin' up to where I wuz a-standin' an' says, 'Howdy, Almetty,' jest like her an' me wuz own born cousins at the very least.

"I says 'howdy' very civil, an' she says, 'I reckon you like hit moughty well over at Orleny's?' Hit made me sorter mad, but I answered her still very civil, an' told her I reckoned a body could git used to anythin', an' then she says, 'Ef I must be to ax questions, where is Gran?' an' I told her hit wuz out uv my power to tell her, fer I shore didn't know, an' then she sorter laughed an' says, 'I reckon you an' him has a good time a-talkin'!'"

Almetta gave this in spiteful imitation of the girl's drawling tones, and said no more.

After a continued pause Orlena asked, "And what sort uv answer did you make to that?"

"Well, I never said nothin'," she replied calmly, "but I jist tried to look a hole plum through her an' skin her on the t'other side."

"Es good a way es any," said Orlena dryly.

The next day at dinner recess the teacher went off with the older boys to where they were constructing a slash dam to make a swimming-hole. The younger children were "trouncing" frogs

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

by balancing a narrow board across a rock, putting the frog on one end and coming down heavily and swiftly on the other, causing the frog to soar aloft.

The older girls were off up the road. They had eaten their dinners, and were tying knots in pieces of love-vine, to test their sweethearts' love, when some one proposed that they play "Dukes a-roving."

"All right; Almet an' me'll choose the sides," agreed Pepper's Mary at once.

The right of first choice was settled by one of those chance games as old as Purim and as common as childhood.

The girls were soon lined up in two rows of five girls each, facing each other and a few feet apart, a row of girls and a row of dukes.

Almetta's line stood still and silent while Mary's advanced and stood before them, singing,

"Here come five Dukes, a-roving, a-roving, a-roving,  
Here come five Dukes a-roving, with a heigh'o ransomtee."

Then they retired and stood silent, while Almetta's line advanced and questioned them in song,

"Pray, what is your good-will, sirs, good-will, sirs, good-will, sirs?  
Pray, what is your good-will, sirs, with a heigh'o ransom-tee?"

Thus the song went on, the lines advancing, singing and retiring, alternately.

Mary's line sang next,

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"Our good-will is to marry, to marry, to marry,  
Our good-will is to marry, with a heigh'o ransomtee,"

And were questioned,

"Pray, will you have one of us, sirs, one of us, sirs, one of  
us, sirs,  
Pray will you have one of us, sirs, with a heigh'o ransom-  
somtee?"

And received for answer,

"You are all too ragged and dirty, dirty, dirty,  
You are all too ragged and dirty, with a heigh'o ransom-  
somtee."

The answer to this was,

"We're quite as good as you, sirs, you, sirs, you, sirs,  
We are quite as good as you, sirs, with a heigh'o ransom-  
somtee."

The Dukes were evidently convinced, and sang,

"The fairest one that I can see is Metty,  
Come and dwell with me, dwell with me, dwell with me;  
The fairest one that I can see is Metty,  
Come and dwell with me."

One Duke had made his choice, and Mary led Almetta back with her as she retired.

The song, with the singers advancing and retiring, was gone all over again and again until the last girl was carried off triumphantly by a Duke.

They had just finished the game and were about to play "Green Gravel," when a couple of men, one middle-aged and the other young,

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

whom none of the girls knew, came riding up. They paused, and the older of them asked,

“Who is the lady that teaches the school?”

The girls looked at each other in silence.

“Whose gal holds the school?” he asked.

No reply.

Finally Pepper's Mary said, “They don't nobody's gal hold hit, ner they don't no lady teach hit.”

“Why, I thought a gal got this school to teach.”

“She did, but she swapped hit off.”

“An' who wuz she?”

“Armildy Ed'ards.”

“Uhuh! Well, do you know where she went to teach?”

“Hit wuz a way off yander som'ers.”

“Uhuh! Well, she's a little bit uv kin to me, an' I had a message fer her. I thought she wuz still here.”

He looked at them in a friendly way and said, “Well, I hope you young'ns has got a good teacher.”

“We have,” said Mary, “a extry good un.”

“Sort uv an old-like gray-head man, ain't he?”

“Naw,” said Mary, and Pearl White offered, “He's sorter red-headed.”

“Jist a chunk uv a boy?”

“Naw.”

“Close kin to some uv ye, I reckon?”

“Naw, he come from 'way off,” answered Mary, and again Pearl White offered, “Down the river som'ers.”

## ALMETTA'S SCHOOLING

"Well, I wist I could see Armilda," he said reluctantly. "I'm jist a-passin' through, buyin' calves, but I lotted on seein' her."

"I see they's some moughty pretty gals in this neighborhood," said the younger man, looking straight at Almetta, who blushed and looked away.

"Well, they ain't none uv 'em took you to raise," said Pepper's Mary sharply.

"Ye hain't, ain't ye?" said the fellow, turning to her. "Maybe you thought I wuz speakin' uv you?"

Pearl White giggled.

"May-bees is mighty busy," she taunted, as they rode off.

"Mary, ain't you ashamed to be so ficety to a strange man that away?" chided Jettie Benton, after the men had ridden off, laughing.

"Well, he oughtn't to 'a' undertook to fool with us, ef he didn't want to be sassed. I reckon we're ever' bit in grain as strange to him as he is to us."

Almetta said nothing. She knew that Mary's sharp tongue had been a deliverance to her. She felt that Mary had meant it to be, and she was grateful.

The girls came into school late that afternoon, and nothing was said of their adventure, but as Almetta went home later Teacy Price came down to the fence and asked her,

"Almet, did you see them two strange-lookin' men go by about noon talkin' about buyin' calves?"

"Yes," replied Almetta. "Who wuz they?"

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

"I dunno who they wuz, but 'pon my honor, I thought I'd laugh my heart out at 'em. Heppy wuz out here on the fence when they rode up, an' that old-like man says, 'Sis, can ye tell us how to git to Allen Sizemore's place?'"

"Heppy, she says, 'Yes, sir, they's *two* roads.'

"'Two roads?' says he.

"'Yes, sir, they's two roads.'

"'Well, which one uv 'em is the best to take?' says he.

"'Well, sir,' she says, 'one uv 'em is broad an' smooth, an' t'other is narrow an' steep.'

"'I 'low,' he says, 'one uv 'em is the river road, an' t'other cuts acrost the hill. I 'low I'll take hit. I'm a-wantin' to see him about buyin' some calves,' he says.

"'They's a gate-keeper on that road,' says Heppy, 'an' he's turnin' some back,' she says.

"'What's the matter?' says he. 'Hain't hit a public road?' says he.

"'Yes,' says she, 'they're both public roads, but one uv 'em is broad an' smooth an' leads to destruction, an' t'other is narrow an' steep an' leads to everlastin' life; and they's a angel with a flamin' syord keepin' the gate.'

"'Well, sir,'" went on Teacy, "I wish you could 'a' been behind that bush with me to a seed that youngest un's face, 'pon my honor I do! He cussed a big oath and sez, 'Let's git out er here!' But the t'other one laughed and sez to Heppy, 'I reckon you air Bill Price's grand-datter.'

"I know in reason, he's hyeard tell uv Hep-

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py's prophesyin', but t'other one hadn't, an' he shore looked fer all the world like he had got him a life sentence. I could tell that Heppy didn't like 'em ary grain; she shore mistrusted 'em."

At this Heppy broke into a wail: "He won't have 'em, he won't have 'em."

She seemed unusually excited, with trembling nerves and her blue eyes burning black.

"Hush, Honey, that's a good gal," persuaded Teacy, but as Heppy swung rapidly around the house on her crutches her wail rose to a shriek.

"Hit allers makes me feel bad," said the woman, "to hear her comin' over that part uv hit. 'Pears like I allers hear uv some sort of devilment right arterwards. Granny Pop was already oneasy over a pullet's comin' in the house this mornin' an' crowin'. She says hit's shore to mean bad luck, and mam she knows hit."

The next week, on Monday, Jerry Taulbee applied to Orlena for board. He gave no reason for changing his abode, but he had given no reason for anything since coming among them, and had withal behaved so "civilly" that none felt like questioning him.

He said, when she hesitated, that he had concluded to give the two weeks for "fodder-in'," and so would only want to stay about two weeks at this time. She never knew just what it was that pleaded a need of befriending, but she took him in.

It had been announced that school would be dismissed next Friday week for the short vacation. Tuesday morning he had walked to school

## *ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN*

with Almetta and the Price children. Wednesday, at noon, Sid Angel had a fight with Chunky Price and left school. Almetta was deeply concerned but said nothing about it at home and hoped it wouldn't be heard, especially as Sid had knocked Chunky Price down for saying that she and Jerry Taulbee were "talking." She had herself threatened Lizzie Price and Pearl White for teasing her about him.

The Price children had tardily gotten "in shape" to go to school, and came fitfully, and Lizzie and Almetta had been companions to and fro. On Thursday morning Jimmy had called to Almetta as she went out the gate,

"Almetty, you an' Liz Price look fer the red heifer on the hill as you come along back this arternoon. Yaller said he hyeard her bell up on the hill yisterday an' she hain't been home fer a week."

Almetta did not intimate that she and Lizzie were not on the best of terms. She answered, "Well, I'll see if I can find her," and went on.

The hill had had a bad reputation in old times. It had been said that "things had happened" there, and that at night "they wuz things to be seed," and Almetta almost regretted that she had not resumed friendly relations with the Prices, though she was not really afraid. She and Orlena had dug "sang" on the hill that summer and had seen nothing alarming, but she preferred broad daylight for the excursion, and not knowing how long the search might take, got excused from school some time before it was dismissed.

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As she crossed the fence at the foot of the hill she heard a cow-bell tinkle. She stopped to listen, but recognized it as belonging to the Prices' old "Pied" and guessed she was grazing on the roadside farther up.

There was no telling where the red heifer was, so Almetta began mounting steadily up the steep hillside. Gaining the first bench, she walked a short distance along it and listened, then mounted to the second bench. She was coming along quietly, listening for the bell, when she saw a man emerging from the "rock house" on the ledge above. She dropped down behind a bush and watched him. He came down not far from where she crouched, and she thought he was going to pass her, but turning and walking a little way out the bench, he stepped down into the bushes and disappeared.

Almetta's heart beat almost aloud. It was the stranger who had eyed her that day on the road and whom Pepper's Mary had "sassed," and she felt strongly that he had no business on the hill. She much mistrusted that he was up to some mischief. She was afraid to move in any direction, and yet afraid to stay.

She listened a long time and then began to creep back by the way she came. Often she stopped, peered into the bushes and listened. Once she thought she heard the tinkle of the red heifer's bell, but "not fer a yoke of cattle," she told herself, "much less a heifer," would she have moved an inch to go after it. "Cow-hunting" was over for that day.

While she waited breathless on the first ledge

## *ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN*

of the hill, identifying the sound of the yellow-hammer beating a tattoo deep in the woods, the Price children passed up the road.

She wanted to call to them to wait, but she knew that while their voices carried up to her clearly, they might not hear her at all if she called, so she let them pass on out of sight. Finally she crept down quietly and went on alone.

When she got home Orlena told her that word had come that her sister Betty had been taken suddenly ill, and she had better go to her, and that she had arranged for Gran to take her on the nag. Jimmy saw no use in being in such a hurry, and suggested that she could take an early start in the cool of the morning and walk it against the middle of the day, and asked if she had found the heifer.

"No," she said, she had "been up on the hill and looked and listened, but hadn't found her," but ef hit wuz all the same and Gran didn't mind takin' the trip, she'd rather start to Betty's right off.

She put her school-books carefully away in the clothes-shelf and rode away behind Gran.

They had overtaken Hence Duke, a boy whom she had known all her life, on the head of Gabriel, and she would ordinarily have had many questions to ask him, but she was anxious and troubled, somewhat for Betty, but more over the stranger on the hill.

She was very quiet, turning things over in her mind, and wishing that Hence were not by, that she might have an opportunity to tell Gran

## ALMETTA'S SCHOOLING

about the two encounters. Her uneasiness was so vague that she did not care to speak of it to Hence, who had developed into a wild, reckless young man.

He and Gran, who were distantly related, talked in a pleasant fashion, and Almetta had little to say when Gran put her down at Betty's door and hurried away to reach home before dark.

She stayed a week at Betty's and the "mischief" which Heppy prophesied, happened while she was gone.

Teacy Price was at the gate as she passed on her way back, and gave her an account of the happening.

"Did you hear about the teacher bein' shot?" she greeted her cheerfully.

"Yes, I hyeard hit," said Almetta sadly.

Teacy eyed her keenly.

"Did ye hear he had a very bad shoot?"

"Yes, we hyeard he was shot through in ten places an' ye could see daylight through him."

"Now, did ye?" said Teacy.

"Yes, an' we hyeard you an' Orleney fotch him home on the fodder sled."

"We did, we shore fotch him home on the fodder sled, an' Heppy's been carryin' on ever sence, an' mam has killed that crowin' pullet, but he never had no ten shoots."

"Why, Tom's Bill said he had been right there and counted 'em hissef!"

"Well, Tom's Bill never come a-nigh him, ner nobody else but Jimmy and Orleney an' Gran an' me an' Uncle Gabriel."

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

“How did you an’ Orleny happen to be by?”

“Well, jist the day arter you left me an’ her started huntin’ fer the red heifer. We ’lowed we’d go down the road, about to Jimmy’s cross fence, at the lower side, an’ climb the hill an’ come this way s’archin’ fer her. Orleny was goin’ ter come back by the middle bench, an’ I wuz goin’ to the top uv the ridge, ef hit tuck hit, to find her.

“Well, we wuz goin’ down the road, and jist as we come ferninst the fishin’ rock we seed Taulbee comin’. The childern had jest passed up, an’ I told ’em ter go on to the field an’ pull fodder. Jerry wuz a-comin’ straight on, an’ I says to Orleny, ‘He seems ter be a moughty civil well-turned feller,’ I says, when, ‘crack!’ come the noise uv a rifle-gun, an’ Jerry whirled an’ headed right over.

“He fell sort uv down the bank an’ sorter behind a little small bush, an’ they wa’n’t no more shots. Orleny run right at onct to him, but I wuz so scared I wouldn’t ’a’ bled a drop ef I had been shot myself, an’ I couldn’t run fast.

“Orleny got there an’ tuck a look at him before I come up. She throwed up her hands and screeched to the top uv her voice, ‘Stone dead!’ She sent me arter the horse and sled, an’ I brung ’em, an’ me an’ her lifted him onto hit an’ brung him to the house.”

“Where wuz he buried?” asked Almetta.

“Buried? He wa’n’t buried at all.”

“He wa’n’t buried? Why, what do ye mean? What did they do with him?”



“She  
threwed up  
her hands and  
screeched to the  
top uv her voice  
‘Stone dead!’ ”



## ALMETTA'S SCHOOLING

“Why, nothin’. Orleny jist kept back the neighbors that wanted to surge in; an’ about eleven o’clock er sich a matter, pap led the mules up around the back way to that bunch uv white-oaks yander, an’ Jerry stepped out the back way, an’ they rid off. Pap took ’im to the railroad an’ the last we hyeard uv him he wuz goin’ yan way.”

“Teacy Price!” exclaimed Almetta, “air ye tellin’ me the truth?”

“Why, I hain’t got no call ter tell ye a lie, have I? Yes, mate, hit’s the truth too. When Orleny got to him she seed he wa’n’t dead, but she says, the fust word, ‘Lay still,’ she says, an’ then she ’zamed him an’ seed the bullet had jist scamped him an’ the place wa’n’t deeper’n the skin. She screeched out at the top uv her voice, ‘Stone dead!’ jist to satisfy them that might be listenin’ and intrusted. You could ’a’ hyeard her to the chimbly rocks.

“When I come up she told me to go an’ git the sled an’ not say a word to nobody, an’ she set down in front uv him an’ waited fer me to bring hit. Uv course we didn’t know how many mought be watchin’, ner how headlong they mought be, so she says to him, ‘Now you jist loll down an’ don’t help yerself nary bit.’ So he laid still as a stone an’ I brung the sled. We drug him onto hit, an’ Orleny straightened ’im out an’ crossed his hands on his breast an’ put her apron over ’im. She walked by his side, ’tween him an’ the hill, an’ we fotch ’im home fer a corpse. Of course we didn’t know who done hit ner what they done hit fer, ner how

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many wuz a-lookin' about, ner how much risk they'd take to finish the job.

"Luck was with us, an' we got him in the house without meetin' a soul an' Orleny fastened the door an' give hit out that he wuz *still breathin'*. She didn't let nobody but Jim an' Uncle Gabe an' Joe Benton an' pap an' me into the house.

"That wuz a Friday, an' he left that night with pap, an' a Sat'd'y Orleny kept Gran in bed all day with wet towels on his face, an' folks a-peepin' through the winders, an' me dyin' laughin' ever' time I changed them cloths, an' Gran a-whisperin', 'Somebody's apter'n not to shoot me fer this some day.'

"Ever'body thought Gran was off huntin' a doctor. Sat'd'y Orleny give out that he wuz a-doin' well, but not wantin' to see nobody. On Sunday she 'lowed he'd rid off in the night, an' folks is jest now catchin' on an' say, Almet, they hain't a bit uv doubt that Orleny's well sensed," she concluded.

Almetta had not come home to stay. She had felt miserably guilty for having come away without telling of the man she had seen on the hill. It had seemed to her that the teacher's blood was on her hands. She was worn out with nursing Betty, and the relief of hearing that the teacher was alive made her almost faint. She could scarcely drag her feet the rest of the way home, and Orlena, coming in from milking, found her lying senseless on the porch floor.

She was easily restored to consciousness, but fell into a low fever and tossed in her sleep and

## ALMETTA'S SCHOOLING

talked of the strange man on the hill and the teacher.

Gran was very gentle and attentive to her, but made no mention of his love, though he talked very freely of it to Orlena, and asked if she thought Almetta might have been caring for Jerry Taulbee.

"No," said Orlena, "I think not; but Pepper's Mary was here t'other day an' she give a little sketch uv the school children bein' playin' on the road an' a couple uv strange men stoppin' to ax about the school teacher, an' her a-sassin' 'em. F'm that an' f'm little things Almetty has let fall in her sleep, I believe she seed one uv them men on the hill the very arternoon you took her to Betty's. She left in sich a hurry I never had much talk with her. She didn't say nothin' to you 'bout 'em, I reckon?"

"No, we fell in with Hence Duke at the mouth of the creek an' he went with us purty nigh the whole way. He tried to git her to talk, but 'peared like she had little to say 'bout anythin'."

"Well, I wouldn't say nothin' about hit, but I shore believe she saw one of 'em that very evenin' while she wuz cow-huntin'. They wuz the very men seed that mornin' on t'other side uv the ridge, an' answered the very description Mary an' the others give uv 'em, an' they stopped at Prices and spoke of buyin' calves.

"Maybe so," he said, and added, "I think a whole lot uv her, Orleny, but I ain't a-goin' to press her about hit."

"No, jist leave her be a while yit, though I

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ain't got no objection to you an' her talking ef she wants to, Gran. She's moughty young, but she hain't nary grain pettish, an' I confidences you a heap."

A few days after this Almetta began to improve, and Orlena made her a pallet on the floor and came and sat by her. The girl told her the whole story of the men who had questioned them and of the man on the hill. Then Orlena told her all that Teacy Price had told of the teacher and some things that Teacy did not know, which he had told her in confidence.

He had no idea, he said, who the younger man was. He might have been any one of a number of young dare-devils who could be hired to shoot, but the older man he recognized, from the children's description, as a smooth villain and a gambler, who was known to have done many evil things which could not be legally proved.

He had killed a man at a card game, about four months before, under circumstances which might bring him to the gallows. He had dodged a trial so far, but if the case ever came up he, Jerry Taulbee, would be an important witness for the prosecution.

Orlena went away to do the night work, and Gran came quietly and took her place by the side of the patient.

"Air ye better, Almetty?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm feelin' all right now, only I'm sorter tired."

"I'm mighty proud ye're mendin'," he said. "I hyeard talk uv Armildy Ed'ards comin'

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back to finish the school after fodderin'. Will ye be well enough to go?"

"Yes, I'll be well enough, but I reckon I won't never try to go to school no more."

"Do ye reckon ye won't?"

"No. Jerry Taulbee was a-larnin' me a whole lot, but I reckon he knowed too much, maybe."

"He mought," agreed Gran.

"I reckon I've l'arned all Armildy Ed'ards knowed to teach me, anyhow, an' hit'll allers be a heap uv company to me to know the world is round." She smiled and drew a tired sigh.

"Yes, mate," said Gran, cordially, "I'm glad she is round! Hit gives a body somethin' to think about. But don't you try to talk; you jist lay still, an' I'll set here by ye."

His brown hand lay, palm downward, on the porch beside hers. Almetta closed her eyes and, shifting her fingers a bit, they came down lightly on those of the boy; she did not move them, and soon her quiet breathing showed she was asleep.

## VIII

### THE "WORKING"

**A**LMETTA recovered rapidly and was soon about her usual duties, her own merry, cheerful self, unchanged except toward Gran, whose quiet suit she was beginning to accept. She had come to love him dearly, but did not want to marry, preferring to have things go on as they were.

Armilda Edwards did not return to finish the school. Like many another it remained untaught, and the young people found employment in the harvesting of beans and corn, digging potatoes, etc., and "workings" were held from house to house. These were occasions when the neighbors were invited in to make a play of work.

"They was a big frolic up at Jim Benton's night before last," reported Teacy Price, dropping into a chair in Orlena's kitchen one morning, where Orlena and Almetta were doing the breakfast dishes.

"They's allers some goin's-on 'round Jim's place, ain't they? He ain't turned a bit like his brother Joe."

"No, he ain't civil like Joe."

"Jerry's Tom came in a pea uv killin' Hence Duke, they say."

## THE "WORKING"

"Yes, an' ef Jim and Marth don't leave off them frolics, there's goin' to be somebody killed."

"I don't see what's got into them people."

"Well, they didn't start out to have a frolic in the first place. Hit were a workin' to begin with. Joe's Liz wuz a-tellin' me about hit yisterday. I went up to the store fer a quarter's wuth o' coffee, an' she wuz a-tellin' me about hit."

"Wuz Lizzie there?" asked Orlena.

"Yes, Liz were thar, but she didn't take no part. They had a lot uv 'em gathered in at Jim's to the stir-off. Jim's folks and Lige's is a-makin' up their cane together, an' they wuz several thar. They said they wuz a-goin' to stir off their last b'ilin' jist about dark, an' some o' the boys let in to beggin' Marth to let'm go fer Tad Ingold an' the banjer an' run a few sets."

"How did Lizzie come to be there?" asked Orlena.

"Well, she's a awful good han' to work with 'lasses or anythin' that away, an' Marthy had got her to come an' help, an' wuz aimin' to give her some uv the 'lasses. Lizzie is hatin' hit awful bad, bein' thar, but she said she couldn't hardly 'fuse to go, Jim an' Joe bein' own brothers, so she tuck the baby an' Rettie to mind hit, an' left the t'others with Jettie an' their granny an' went."

"Well, why didn't she take them young'ns an' come on home?"

"Well, she says Joe had promised to come fer 'em on the mule, an' he wuz late, she says, an'

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then Marth begged 'em to stay all night an' they took a notion to stay, she says, an' then the boys got up the dance."

"Then," said Orlena with angry contempt, "I 'low they tuck out the beds and brought in the banjer an' the jugs an' the forty-fives an' they all frolicked an' fit."

"Well, hit 'us jist about that away, I reckon, f'm what Lizzie said. Lizzie says she wuz scared slap to death, though she says they started out very well. The boys brung Tad an' the banjer, an' Buddy's gals, an' they had jist enough to make up a set, an' she says they had run two er three very civil sets, an' wuz a-gettin' along mighty nice, tell Hence an' Jerry's Tom come. They wuz both drinkin' some, but not to say drunk; but Lizzie says she could tell they had more licker with them, hid out som'ers; fer fust one, then t'other, kep' gittin' up an' goin' out an' a-comin' back. She says Hence come in a little funnier ever' time, an' Tom a little more solider, tell finally Hence wuz plum funny, an' Tom wuz plum ill.<sup>1</sup>

"Lizzie says they wuz all gittin' sorter scared an' most uv the gals wanted to stop dancin', but Buddy's gals wanted to keep right on."

"Pime blank like 'em!" said Orlena.

"Well, you know Tom's been sparkin' Buddy's Sissy, off an' on fer allers, an' when Hence an' Tom come she wuz dancin' with Jim's little Johnny. He's jist a little chunk uv a boy, an' wuz jist dancin' to make out the set. He offered

<sup>1</sup> Tempered.

## THE "WORKING"

to give up his place to Tom, but Tom 'lowed he didn't care to dance, an' Johnny kept right on.

"Hence didn't dance neither, tell he got plum drunk; then he tuck a notion to dance with Sissy an' tuck her away from Johnny. Tom had stepped out, an' when he come back Tad had jist called the figger, 'Ladies to the center an' gents all around,' an' Hence wuz right ferninst Tom with his arms around Sissy, an' as close to him as I am to you—the way Lizzie wuz tellin' hit. She says she seed Tom put his hand in his coat pocket, but she never drawed the first idy of him havin' a pistol tell all in a flash he had drawed an' shot. Jim was standin' right by 'im an' he knocked up his arm, an' the bullet went right in the beam over Hence's head. Lizzie says they had the masterest cuttin's up fer a while you ever seed, but some uv the men grabbed Tom and tuck his pistol an' they jist helt him an' let 'im rave, an' some uv t'other fellows helt Hence."

"Well, did Hence shoot?"

"No, they didn't have but jist one pistol betwixt 'em, an' she wuz Hence's, but Tom wuz carryin' her; she wuz jist a little small thirty-two. But she stopped the frolic.

"Lizzie says the boys had drunk up all their licker before the trouble begun, so they got plum sober that night an' went off the next mornin' apparently the best uv friends. Said they didn't have a thing ag'inst one another, Lizzie said."

"Will they do anything to Tom?" asked Almetta.

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“Well, they could git 'im fer lettin' 'er off in the house, an' fer shootin' at Hence, uv course, ef anybody had a mind to give him trouble over hit; but Jim an' them 'lowed hit were jist a little racket amongst friends; an' they ain't aimin' to give him no trouble; that wuz the talk when Lizzie left.”

“Tom wuz havin' moughty friendly actions when he drewed that pistol an' shot at Hence, now, weren't he?” said Orlena.

“Well, they 'lowed he wuz drunk an' didn't rightly know what he wuz a-doin', an' he said yistidy mornin' so Lizzie says, that he wouldn't 'a' done hit fer any amount; an' he cried an' said he loved Hence as well as airy brother he had an' him an' Hence went off together well satisfied, Lizzie says.”

“Takin' the pistol with 'em, I reckon?”

“Lizzie never said whether they did er not, but I 'low they did, apt as not. Lizzie said Lige wuz havin' some talk uv gittin' out a war'nt fer Tom fer carryin' concealed weepins. You know he never has been so overly friendly to none o' them people sence they fell out over the timber that time, an' he was moughty mad about him shootin' around his wife an' young'ns; but none uv 'em could pime blank say they seed Tom onconceal the pistol, an' I reckon nothin' will come of hit.”

“Ef they'd change that fool law ag'in' concealed weepins, an' turn hit ag'in onconcealed weepins,” said Orlena, “hit might be some benefit. Nobody never does see anybody onconceal 'em!”

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"Wuz they several at the stir-off, Teacy?" asked Almetta.

"Yes, Lizzie said they wuz several."

"Why didn't we raise no cane this year, Orleney, and have us a stir-off?"

"Well, we've jist had so much cane 'lasses we air sorter burnt out on 'em this year; an' then, too, I'm sorter dependin' on Jerry's folks payin' back what we let 'em have last year. Ef they does, hit'l jist about do us. Fresh m'lasses is moughty good with plenty uv butter an' hot bread, an' they air very good to sweeten dried apples an' gingerbread; but I don't depend on 'em fur no other kind of sweetnin'; an' Jimmy hardly ever teches 'em."

"We'll go to Jerry's stir-off," said Almetta. "I jest love to strip cane an' feed the mill an' ride the horse around the press but I hain't cared nothin' 'bout eatin' the warm foam sence hit made me sick onct. Orleney, why don't we have us some kind uv a workin' here?"

"Well, Jimmy's been talkin' fer a long time uv havin' a barn raised. He's had the wind-works laid fer two er three years, an' he's had the boards rived fer the roof ever sence last summer. They's a plenty uv pole timber growin' handy, an' he is actually needin' a new barn."

"Why, shore he's needin' a new barn; an' they's a whole passel uv beans needin' threadin' up fer the women an' gals to work on."

"No, we ain't got so overly many beans, not more'n we can handy do ourselves, but I mought

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scrap up enough fer a little stringin' fer the women; an' you an' the gals could quilt your diamond top, ef you'd a mind to."

"That would be all sorts uv a workin'," said Teacy Price.

"Let's have hit, Orleney; let's have hit right off!" begged Almetta.

"Well, we'll see what Jimmy says about hit."

"Jimmy was agreeable to the plan, being really in need of the barn, and he and Gran cut and hauled in the small round logs with which to build the walls.

Almetta made a trip to the store for quilt-lining and padding and nails and sugar, and invited Joe's folks and other neighbors.

Jimmy and Gran laid the foundation stones for the new barn, which was to consist of two large log-pens for the stalls, with a hallway between and a roof over all. Many houses as well as barns were built on this plan, which has much in its favor.

The women folks, ably assisted by Teacy Price, tidied up the "houses," scrubbing the floors with sand from the river, and swept the yards until only the most persistent tufts of grass kept their hold on the earth. Almetta notched papers in intricate designs for the dish and clothes shelves and made "flower pots" (bouquets) for "fireboards" (mantels) and tables.

By seven o'clock on the appointed day the men were working on the barn, in two squads, with four notchers to the squad, and the boys were carrying the poles. There was considerable ri-

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valry between the two groups as to which laid up the rounds the faster, and some among the notchers as to which man "kept his corner up" best.

Gran was the youngest man in charge of a corner, but only Bill Price, who was acknowledged to be the champion notcher of the whole region, kept a bit ahead of him; and it was agreed quietly, on the side, that "Gran's mought actually be a little grain the squarest, plumbest corner."

Uncle Gabriel Angel was a master hand with a broad-ax, and he and Jimmy squared the wall plates, skilfully hewing into shape the long logs which would go at the top of the walls the full length of the two pens and the hall, "tying" the whole together.

At the house the girls were swinging their quilting frames from the beams of the lower house, while the women had established themselves on the porch in front of the upper house, stringing and threading the beans on long, coarse threads to dry.

It was a "working" in simple truth, but a very social one, and conversation, seasoned with teasing and laughter, flowed on unchecked. Orlena, Almetta and Teacy were dividing their time between the kitchen, where preparation for dinner was going on, and the groups of women and girls.

"Orleny, air ye aimin' to mix the fall beans with these here 'little greasies'?" asked one of the women.

"No, Viny brought me them little greasies yis-

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tiddy, an' I jist put 'em in on top uv the fall beans. They weren't but a few in the sack an' I jist left 'em. She wuz in sort uv a hurry to git back. She hyeard we wuz goin' to have a little workin', she said, an' 'lowed she'd bring me some beans. She had to come as fur as the store, anyhow, she said."

"Viny don't leave home fer long at a time sence that child got burnt up, winter 'fore last, does she?" asked another.

"No, an' I feel moughty sorry fer her. 'Pears like she don't git over hit a-tall."

"She's a moughty honest good woman, Viny is."

"Yes, she shore it. She's been payin' me, by littles, in truck uv one kind an' another fer linsey I let her have last winter fer the children's wear. That un that got burnt up, you know, wuz wearin' an' outin' dress, an' hit's moughty easy caught afire."

"Yes, a heap o' people is missing hit moughty bad a-sellin' their sheep. I'd ruther, two to one, wear linsey as outin' fer winter. Hit's the warmest an' the lastiest too."

"Why, shore, one good linsey undercoat will outwear five or six outin' ones, an' when hit's plum wore out acrost the knees ye can fin' enough in the tail uv hit to make a young'un a coat," declared a thrifty-looking middle-aged woman.

"Outin' ain't so costly to buy, but hit's mighty dear when a little one gits burnt up jist trying to keep warm."

"Hit's dear, too."

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"Did ye have several beans this fall, Orleney?" asked Peter's Suze.

"Yes, I've got several dried an' some pickled in brine."

"Marthy Lewis is a-threadin' all uv hern. Hit's a sight the stuff that gal puts away ever' winter fer jist herself an' Johnny an' them two childern."

"Marthy's bound they sha'n't starve."

"Yes, I laugh to myself about hit a heap o' times. I wuz at her pa's when Johnny sent Jim Benton to ax fer her. The old man jist stormed around, but Marthy told him he'd as well to give her up to Johnny when she wuz bein' axed fer, an' save his name fer havin' his own way."

"I reckon Marthy gits her own-wayedness from her pap."

"Shore, she gits hit from him."

"Well, the old man 'lowed they'd starve, an' 'he'd be jiggered,' he sez, 'ef he'd let 'em come back on him with a passel o' young'ns.' Them wuz the very words he spoke, but he give in, when he had a bound to, an' then he turned in an' had Maria to give 'em a big infair supper an' acted fer all the world like he'd got hit all up hisself."

"He's awful quare turned anyhow."

"Yes, one minute he'll be so ill-natured they's no standin' 'im a-tall; an' then he'll whiff around an' be the best fellow ever wuz."

"Yes, but his ill-nature is more dependable than his good-nature."

"Hit's shore to be that away too."

"Granny Pop, how does Heppy seem to be

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havin' her health now?" asked Jerry's Susan, reaching for a fresh supply of beans and changing the subject.

"Aye, Heppy's very shabby most uv the time. Hit kills her stone dead that she can't go to the field with the t'other young'ns; but she does odd jobs around the house an' gits along what you mought say very well, when they ain't no disturbment of no kind clost about."

"An' then does she prophesy?"

"Well, some calls hit that. She goes on a quare lot."

"Do you think she had a vision, Granny?"

"Well, I dunno. Sometimes I think she did, an' then ag'in I think she didn't."

"Well," said Jerry's Susan, a fair, plump, sweet-faced woman, "I know a heap uv folks don't believe in visions a-tall but fer my part I a little believe in 'em. Don't you, Orleney?"

"Well, I don't know, I hain't never had none myself."

"Well, I hain't neither, fer that matter, but I don't 'low to miss the warnin's an' encouragements uv other folks's."

"Well," said Orlena, "the nighest I ever come to believin' in one wuz when 'Lizabeth's little Alifair died. You remember hit died about a week arter hit's granny died. Her an' her granny had allers been mighty big pardners an' hit had laid (slept) with the old woman ever sence hit wuz weaned. Well, jist a few minutes before hit died, hit opened hit's eyes an' smiled, an' retched out hit's little arms an' says, 'Open the winder, mammy, an' le' me go to granny,'

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an' I says, 'Do you see yer granny, Honey?' an she says, 'Yes, she's a-standin' out there by the lily bush.' Then she fell back an' shet her eyes an' in a few minutes she stopped breathin'. There never had been a winder in the house, an' I jist reasoned hit mought 'a' been the winder uv heaven she seed."

"I ain't a doubt uv hit," said Susan reverently, "an' hit ain't a grain onreasonable to me that the Lord lets children an' folks without larnin' have a little extry encouragements. He knows we've got a plenty of discouragements."

"Hit's shore to be the fact," said one.

"Yes," pursued Susan. "Now there's my Testament, with ever'thin' a body needs to know writ out in hit, an' I can't read a word, nary word! I've had all the childern's births set down in hit, an' sometimes when I can't sleep good I puts hit under my piller an' hit 'pears like hit eases me some."

"I shore believe hit'll do more good than puttin' an ax under the bed to cut off pain."

"I'll inshore hit, though I've seed the other tried many uv a time."

"Well, I don't believe in puttin' too much trust in no kind uv a sign," said Susan, "though I'll grant some uv 'em seems to work very regular; but visions is different; an' Heppy has set me to thinkin' profitable thoughts many uv a time; an' when she gits to talkin' an' comin' over that part about, 'He's been a-turnin' some back to-day; He won't have 'em,' I'm powerful oneasy untell I hear who's dead an' powerful glad when hit's strangers."

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"I reckon strangers hates bad luck as bad as anybody, but they don't lay on your mind so hard."

"Orleny, do you know where the scissors is at?" asked Almetta, breaking in on the talk of the women.

"They're on top uv the clo'es-shelf, I think, but you'll need to go to the barn an' borry some uv the men's pocket-knives. You'll need two or three to cut threads with."

"Rettie," said Almetta, to Jettie Bentley's younger sister, on returning to the room, "won't you step out to the barn an ax some uv the men to lend us their knives? That's a good girl."

"Tell 'em they can bite off their chaws," said Pepper's Mary.

"You can tell 'em that yerself," said Rettie; "I'll not."

"All right then, shape up your little manners an' go an' ax Sid Angel fer his'n; he don't chaw terbaccar nohow, an' he's the purtiest boy out there," said Mary maliciously.

"Now, I'll not go at all," declared Rettie.

"Now, Mary, see what ye git fer bein' smart," laughed Almetta.

"I'll go," said Jettie.

"Whose did ye git?" asked Mary upon her return.

"Pap's an' Uncle Gabe's," she replied, calm in the consciousness that even Mary could make nothing out of this. By this time the girls were busily engaged, searching the quilts for familiar pieces.

"Here's some like Metty's white dress she

## THE "WORKING"

wore to the fun'ral," said one, "an' here's a whole square in the top row uv jist them two colors."

"Yes," said Almetta, "I made that square to remember the day by, an' here's one I wore at monthly meetin' over on Dusty last fall. Me an' Granny Ann's Alifair went together, an' here's some uv hers. I brung the scraps with me when I come down here."

"Here's a piece uv the dress Orleney's got on now, an' a piece uv yours, Mary."

"This is a pretty square, but I don't know nobody 'round here that's got airy dress like the pieces."

"No, Marthy Lewis give me them pieces. Her sister had sent her a big bunch from over on Red Bird, an' she give me enough to make that square to remember her by. A whole lot uv the squares is pieced uv jist two colors, an' nearly all uv 'em is to put me in mind uv somebody."

"The linin's very pretty, Almetty. Do you reckon hit won't run?"

"No, I'll inshore hit not to run, an' hit's plum lasty, too," said Mary Betts. "Mammy got her an apron off'n that very bolt o' goods in corn-plantin' time; an' she biles hit moughty nigh ever' week; an' the color is as bright as hit ever wuz. You got hit at Joe's, didn't ye, Almetty?"

"Yes, I went up there Monday an' got hit."

"Well, I thought I knowed the piece. He brought hit on last summer."

"Jettie, when is your pappy goin' to have any new goods in?" asked Buddy's Sissy.

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"Why, he's expectin' on gittin' in a wagin-load in a week er two, I hyeard him say."

"I wonder ef he's brought on any snow-white goods?"

"I never hyeard him say, but I don't 'low he did."

"Well, I wisht somebody'd bring on some. I'm dead on my feet fer a snow-white dress. I'm aimin' ter have me one off'n a blue an' white checkered piece Sim Duke brought on. Hit's moughty fur to go, but it'd pay ye to see Sim's goods."

"Pappy's goin' to bring us a organ when he goes fer the goods," said Jettie.

"I believe I could play on her," said Sissy. "I never had a grain of trouble larnin' to sew on the sewin'-machine."

"That's just fool talk!" scoffed Pepper's Mary. "They ain't no tunes in a sewin'-machine. Hit's jist a dead-level chug, chug, chug, an' runnin' her ain't play; hit's pyore work. But an organ, that's differnt. She's got tunes in her, an' that little blind gal of little Gabe's can set an' draw 'em out uv her by the hour. She can play 'Heavenly Sunlight' an' 'Set my feet on higher ground,' an' any amount uv bal-lets an' ditties."

"Sich as 'Devilish Mary?'" asked Sissy.

"Yes, or 'Devilish Sissy,' airy one," said Mary calmly. "Almetty," she continued, "you can remember all uv us that's here to-day by this nice quiltin' we're doin', an' when you see them fine, long, robustious stitches on yon side, you'll say, 'Pore ol' Sissy; I remember jist as

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well as I want to the day she set in Orleny's lower house an' put 'em in.' "

"Yes," said Sissy, "an' while she's cryin' over me she'll say, 'Pore ol' Mary, I can't git hit out o' my mind the way the cat looked jumpin' through her stitches, that very same day.' "

"Well, speakin' uv cats," said Mary quickly, "puts me in mind that they hain't but one raily important thing about this quilt."

"What's that, Mary?"

"Why, when we git hit done we'll toss the cat in hit; an' whose ever shoulder hit jumps out over we'll wrap her up in the quilt; an' she'll be the fust one married."

"Here, gals," said Sissy, with a great show of industry, ignoring the fact that she had two husbands already, "give me more room. I can make bigger stitches than these ef they's any call fer 'em."

"C'n ye make them any more scragglin'?" asked Mary.

Ordinarily the quilt would not have been finished in the day; but the suggestion of tossing the cat was quite a spur to the quilters, and when Almetta came to say dinner was ready the girls said they would quilt right on till the men and women were through.

It was an unusually large crowd for a "workin'," and dinner was taken in a number of relays, the men first. Jimmy insisted upon waiting himself, but there were only four or five men of his age and older, and the younger men would not hear to it; and so he sat down

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among his neighbors, and when the last chair had scraped upon the bare floor, and all was still, he nodded at Gabriel Angel for the blessing, and said, "Go on, Uncle Gabriel."

Table manners are nowhere observed more decorously than by the people of the mountains, and the meal proceeded in a most orderly way. Jimmy had an eye for the whole table, and in a quiet way urged replenishing for all.

Orlena and Almetta and Pepper's Mary, passed coffee, sweet milk, "sour" milk, fried chicken, chicken and dumplings, potatoes, corn, beans, bowls of snowy white butter, honey, apple-pie, and pound-cake; while Teacy kept a supply of hot bread ready. The men for the most part ate quietly, and soon gave way to the next instalment.

These were somewhat more talkative. Indeed the formalities of the occasion, strictly observed by the first table, when the older men assembled, and the blessing was asked, and the dishes first partaken of, soon gave way before the genial spirit of the occasion, and by the time the rest of the grown folks and most of the boys had been served there was no formality whatever. After these the girls and two or three left-over boys waited upon themselves in merry fashion. Their conversation, a running fire of teasing and laughter, did not flag from the time that Buddy's Sissy, "making a long arm" to help herself, called to Sid, "Come an' set right down here by me, brother, we're waitin' fer you like one hungry dog waits fer another," until Chunky Price, full to repletion, pushed

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back, declining the pie Almetta was urging upon him, and Pepper's Mary observing which, remarked, "Go way, 'Lasses, you done lost yo' taste!"

There had not been a great many beans to string, and the women were through their work. Some of them helped Orlena with the dishes, and the rest lent their presence to the encouragement of the barn-raising. Almetta was excused from further service in the kitchen, and she and the girls, after a visit at the barn, gathered again about the quilt.

"Let's tell tales," said Almetta, when they were all settled.

"Well, let's do. Who'll begin?"

"What kind uv tales?"

"Oh, jist common tales."

"Mary Betts knows a whole lot uv old-fashioned tales."

"Them's the best kind," said Almetta. "I never do git tired listening to 'em. Go on, Mary Betts, and tell us one."

"Tell that one about Jack an' the Bull-strops, Mary. Now ever'body be quiet."

"Well," said Mary, "one time they wuz a old woman had three gals an' jist one little boy. The little boy's name wuz Jack.

"Well, the old woman told the gals they didn't have much to eat an' she wuz willin', ef they wuz, to starve Jack to death, an' they'd be one less to feed, an' they said all right; they wouldn't let him have nary bite to eat. So they all watched to see that he didn't git nothin'.

"Well, ever' time anybody would come he'd

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ask fer somethin' to eat; an' they'd take him in the kitchen an' grease his mouth. When he come back in the house he would ask ag'in fer something to eat; an' the old woman would say, 'Look at the grease around your mouth! you been eatin' all day!'

"Now Jack had a little bull down in the pasture, an' he had a little song he whistled, but he soon got so weak from starvin' that he couldn't whistle his little song. The little bull noticed hit an' axed Jack what wuz the matter. Jack told him they wuz tryin' to starve him to death. An' he says, 'Jack, you knock on my right horn, an' you'll git bread an' meat, an' knock on my left horn, an' you'll git bread an' cheese.' Well, Jack knocked on fust one horn an' then t'other, an' he et an' he et, an' he got so stout he could whistle his little song again.

"Well, when he got back to the house an' the old woman seen him lookin' so fat, she told the gals they would have to watch him; that he wuz gittin' somethin' to eat.

"So she set 'One Eye' to watch him. Well, One Eye watched an' watched till her one eye went out, an' she couldn't see him git nothin'.

"Then the old woman got 'Two Eyes' to watch him, so she went an' watched till her two eyes went out; an' she couldn't see him git nothin'.

"Then the old woman told 'Three Eye' to go. So she went an' watched an' watched till her one eye went out; an' she watched an' watched till her two eyes went out; an' she watched an' watched till her three eyes went out; an' she

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couldn't see him git nothin'. Thar wuz the old woman an' three blind gals.

"The next mornin' the little boy went down to the pastur. The little bull told Jack he had a plan; fer him to go to the house an' tell the old woman he thought they ought to kill the little bull an' eat him, an' to tie a rope around his horns an' git her to hold him; an' fer Jack ter take a ax an' start to knock him in the head, an' make a mistake an' knock the old woman in the head an' kill her.

"So Jack went up to the house an' told the old woman he wanted to kill his pet. She wuz awful keen to git the bull killed. Jack tied a rope around his horns an' led him up to the house an' told the old woman to come out an' hold him. She did, an' Jack took the ax an' made a mistake an' killed her. Then the little bull said, 'Jump on my back, Jack, an' let's go; so Jack clum on his back an' they started.

"When dinner-time come Jack knocked on the little bull's right horn an' got bread an' meat an' knocked on his left horn an' got bread an' cheese; an' the bull picked grass along the fence-corners. When night come they done the same things, an' they laid down jist up in the bushes to sleep.

"They slept well that night, but the next mornin' the little bull sez to Jack, 'Jack,' he sez, 'I dreamed a moughty bad dream last night.' 'What did you dream?' sez Jack. 'Well, I dreamed we wuz goin' along, an' we met a b'ar, an' me an' the b'ar fit, an' the b'ar killed me. Ef we do meet a b'ar,' he sez, 'you git down

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off'n my back an' climb a tree till we fight, en ef he kills me, you wait till he leaves, an' then git down an cut three strops out of my sides an' tie 'em 'round your waist. Cut my horns off,' he sez, 'to git somethin' to eat by, an' go on an' call yourself, "Jack-in-the-bull-strops."'

"Well, they went on, an' late that day they met a pant'er. Jack got down an' clum a tree, an' the bull an' the pant'er fit an' the bull killed the pant'er.

"That night they laid down to sleep ag'in, an' the next mornin' the bull sez, 'Jack, I dreamed we met another pant'er, an' me an' the pant'er fit, an' the pant'er killed me. Ef we do meet somethin',' he sez, 'you git down an' climb a tree, an' ef hit kills me, you wait till hit goes on; an' then you git down an' cut three strops out o' my sides an' tie them 'round your waist; saw off my horns and go on, an' call yourself "Jack-in-the-bull-strops." They travelled all day, an' that evenin' they met a b'ar. Jack got down an' clum a tree, an' the bull an the b'ar fit an' the b'ar killed the bull.

"Jack waited till the b'ar went on, an' then he got down an' cut three strops out uv the bull's sides an' tied them around his waist. He knocked the bull's horns off an' stuck 'em in his pockets, an' went on and called hissself 'Jack-in-the-bull-strops.'

"He went on an' on an' arter a while he met a man with a gun. The man says, 'Little boy, what's your name?'

"'Jack-in-the-bull-strops. Gim'me that gun,' says Jack.

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"The man says, 'No, brother, I can't do without my gun.'

" 'Jump off my waist, one of my strops, an' tie that man down tell I can git away with his gun,' says Jack.

"The strop jumped off, tied the man down, an' Jack tuck his gun an' got away with hit.

"He went on tell he met a man with three dogs; an' the man sez, 'What is your name, little boy?'

" 'Jack-in-the-bull-strops. Gim'methemdogs,' says Jack.

" 'No, brother, I can't do without my dogs,' sez the man.

" 'Jump off my waist, one of my strops, an' tie that man down tell I can git his dogs an' git away with 'em,' sez Jack.

"The strop done so, an' Jack went on packin' his gun an' callin' his dogs.

"He travelled all that night and all the next day, an' he met a man with a horse, an' the man sez, 'What's your name, little boy?'

"An' he sez, 'Jack-in-the-bull-strops; gim'me that horse.'

" 'No, brother,' says the man, 'I couldn't do without my horse.'

" 'Jump off my waist, my t'other bull-strop, an' tie this man down tell I git away with his horse,' sez Jack.

"The strop jumped off, tied the man down, an' Jack got away with the man's horse.

"After that Jack went on, ridin' his horse, packin' his gun an' callin' his dogs."

There was silence as the story ended.

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“Jack turned out to be a master feller, didn’t he?” said one of the girls.

“He shore did.”

Hence Duke came in and insisted on helping with the quilting, but Buddie’s Sissy was the only one who offered to make room for him, and he had his own reason for not wanting to sit by her.

He had openly flirted with and “sparked” her for a long time before and since her two unsuccessful marriages. But he had something very near akin to love for Almetta, whom he had known from childhood. Getting no encouragement from her, he soon went out. A number of the boys came in and sat about encouraging or criticising the workers, and the afternoon wore on past the middle when some one summoned all the boys to help with the long logs, and the girls resumed their story telling.

“Now, Mary, tell about Jack going to seek his fortune.”

“Yes, yes, tell that un.”

“All right, set over a little Jettie, an’ give me a little more room. I’m about to git my corner done.”

“So’m I,” said Pepper’s Mary, “but I ’low Almetty’s goin’ to spend the day quiltin’ on that one square. Hit’s pieced out uv the scraps f’m two uv Gran’s shirts Orleney made him in the spring, an’ she can’t git ’em quilted fine enough to suit her. We’ll never git to toss the cat ef somebody don’t bring the ox-team an’ pull her away f’m that square.”

Almetta, blushing hotly, joined in the gale of

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laughter; she was being rather careful of that bit.

After they had laughed and teased for some time, some one remembered the interrupted story and demanded—

“Go on, Mary Betts, an’ tell how Jack went to seek his fortune.”

“Well, one time Jack went to seek his fortune. As he wuz goin’ along he met a gander, an’ the gander sez, ‘Hey, Jack, where you goin’?’”

“‘I’m goin’ to seek my fortune,’ says Jack.

“‘May I go with you?’ says the gander.

“‘Yes, the more the merrier, come on.’

“Jack went a-whistlin’, an’ the gander went a-blowin’, an’ on they went.

“After a while they met a dog, an’ the dog sez, ‘Where you goin’?’”

“‘I’m goin’ to seek my fortune,’ says Jack.

“‘May I go with you?’ says the dog.

“An’ Jack sez, ‘The more the merrier; come on.’

“Jack went a-whistlin’, the gander went a-blowin’, an’ the dog went a-barkin’, an’ on they went.

“They met a ram, an’ the ram sez, ‘Where you goin’?’”

“‘I’m goin’ to seek my fortune,’ sez Jack.

“‘May I go with you?’ sez the ram.

“‘Yes,’ sez Jack, ‘the more the merrier; come on.’

“Jack went a-whistlin’, the gander went a-blowin’, the dog went a-barkin’, an’ the ram went a-blatin’, an’ on they went.

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“They met a bull, an’ the bull sez, ‘Where you goin’?’

“ ‘I’m goin’ to seek my fortune,’ sez Jack.

“ ‘May I go with you?’ asked the bull.

“ ‘Yes, the more the merrier; come on,’ sez Jack.

“Jack went a-whistlin’, the gander went a-blowin’, the dog went a-barkin’, the ram went a-blatin’, an’ the bull went a-bellerin’, an’ on they went.

“They met a rooster. ‘Where you goin’?’ sez the rooster.

“ ‘I’m goin’ to seek my fortune,’ sez Jack.

“ ‘May I go with you?’

“ ‘Yes,’ sez Jack, ‘the more the merrier; come on.’

“Jack went a-whistlin’, the gander went a-blowin’, the ram went a-blatin’, the dog went a-barkin’, the bull went a-bellerin’, the rooster went a-crowin’, an’ on they went.

“They met a cat. The cat sez, ‘Where you goin’?’

“ ‘I’m goin’ to seek my fortune,’ sez Jack.

“ ‘May I go with you?’ says the cat.

“ ‘Yes,’ sez Jack, ‘the more the merrier; come on.’

“Jack went a-whistlin’, the gander went a-blowin’, the ram went a-blatin’, the dog went a-barkin’, the bull went a-bellerin’, the rooster went a-crowin’, the cat went a-mewin’, an’ on they went.

“They went on to an old waste-house an’ tuck up to stay all night. Jack axed the dog what he’d have fer supper, an’ he said he’d take a

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little meat. The cat said she'd eat with the dog, an' Jack said he'd eat with 'em.

"The gander said he'd take a little corn; an' the rooster said he'd eat with him.

"The sheep said he'd take a little hay, an' the bull said he'd eat with him.

"When hit come time to lay down Jack said he'd lay on the bed, an' the cat said he'd lay on the foot uv the bed with him. The dog said he'd sleep over in the corner, an' the gander said he'd sleep jist back under the bed, an' the rooster said he'd sleep up on the j'ists. The bull said he had very long horns an' he'd sleep jist outside the door, an' the ram said he'd sleep jist inside.

"Well, 'way 'long in the night a rogue come in to steal somethin'. He hunkered down on the h'a'th-rock an' begun ter blow up the fire. The ram didn't like that, so he butted him into the fireplace. The rogue crawled out an' begin to blow ag'in.

"By this time the cat flew out an' begin to scratch one uv the rogue's legs, an' the gander begin to bite t'other, an' the rooster up on the j'ists begin to crow, an' the dog begin to bark, an' all this time, Jack snored on. The ram waited a few minutes, then he stepped back a step or two, an' give him another buttin'.

"Finally the rogue got scared an' started to run. Jist as he went out the door the bull caught him on his horns an' tossed him back into the room an' the ram butted him out ag'in.

"Well, they kept tossin' him back'ards an' for'ards, the bull tossin' him in an' the ram

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buttin' him out, tell finally he got loose an' broke to run.

"When he got home he told his companions that he'd never do no more stealin'; he told 'em that that night where he had went to steal there wuz a old woman with a wool bag, an' ever' time he'd go to blow up the fire she'd knock him into the ashes with it, an' two more old women, he told 'em, had the wool cyards, cyardin' on his legs, an' a man lay over in the bed, strugglin' like he wuz dyin', an' when he started to run, he sez, a man on the outside with a pitchfork tossed him back, an' the old woman on the inside with the wool bag knocked him back out.

"But what scared him most uv all, he sez, wuz somebody up on the j'ists hollerin', 'Fetch 'im h-e-e-r-e an' I'll e-e-t 'im! Fetch him h-e-e-r-e an' I'll e-e-t 'im!'"

"Well," said Rettie Bentley, "what about him bein' more afeard uv the rooster than he wuz uv the bull with the long horns?"

"Why, Rettie, wouldn't you be afeard uv bein' et up by somethin'?"

"Not by no rooster," said Rettie emphatically.

"We've pretty nigh got this quilt finished now, gals. Rettie, honey, hadn't you better be findin' the cat?"

"I've a'ready found her, she's right out here in the apple-tree takin' her a nap uv sleep."

A half-hour's more brisk work, to the accompaniment of tales and songs, and Mary Betts announced, "This quilt is p'intedly finished off.

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Fly around here now, gals, an' let's git her out o' the frames."

"Almetty, where's somethin' to draw the tacks?"

"Rettie, sister, git your cat."

It was soon a very wide-awake cat. The laughter and screams of the girls as they tossed it drew Gran, who had just come by on an errand, to the door of the lower house. He was just in time to see Old Tabbie take a flying leap over Almetta's shoulder and disappear like a streak of white and yellow. In a moment her companions had wrapped the girl in it and were proclaiming,

"You'll be the fust, Almetty, you'll be the fust married!"

Gran stood on the porch and watched them till the laughter subsided, and said, "Gals, we're jist gittin' ready to h'ist the wall-plates onto the barn. You'd better come an' see hit well done."

"Come on, gals," said Pepper's Mary. "Hit'll jist take us to see that buildin' finished right." And they all trooped out to the barn lot.

The raising and placing of the long, heavy wall-plates was an interesting affair, which took strength and care and was accompanied by more or less danger, in case of something or some one giving way and allowing the plates to slip back on the skids up which they were pushed and slid into place, on top of the two side-walls.

Amid many shouted commands and warnings and much straining and shoving the first one

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was shoved to the top of the skids and successfully brought over the top of the wall. It was received and put in place by the four men, perched for the purpose on the transverse walls, and was pronounced by all to be as pretty a fit as they hoped to see. Its mate was finally settled on the other side, and it was short work to place the "rofters," as Uncle Gabriel called them, and the barn-raising was through! The boards for the roof Jimmy and Gran would do alone and at their leisure.

The barn had been the excuse for the "working," and the men were very complacent over their task, and all stood around it for some time before parting. The girls and women were not behind in pronouncing it to be a "right building," and all agreed that it had been a fine working and a splendid day.

The afternoon had worn almost to sundown, and with many cordial assurances between themselves of "Now I want you to come ter see us," and equally cordial assurances of meaning to accept, the neighbors parted.

Granny Pop Price and Teacy were the last to go. Granny had lighted her pipe and stood for a moment on the porch, drawing steadily. Looking across the hills she vouchsafed, "The timber is yallerin'."

"Yes, we ain't gittin' the barn any too soon," said Orlena; "they's a'ready been teches uv frost, an' winter'll soon be on us."

"I'm afyeard so," said the old lady. "Well, Teacy, I see Heppy's raised her supper smoke, an' we'd better be goin'."

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“Good-by, Teacy,” called Almetta. “You put us in mind to have this workin’, an’ I’m awful proud uv hit.”

“Hit’s been a master workin’,” said Teacy, “an’ I’ll be down some time to help you bind the quilt.”

## IX

### TEACY GOSSIPS

FALL was rapidly advancing. Frosts were being reported on the heads of the hollows.

About a week after the "working" Almetta came in from the milking-place chattering her teeth and drawing her shoulders together.

"Whee!" she said, setting her bucket of milk on the table and holding her hands out over the cook-stove, which was still warm from the breakfast fire. "Hit's cold to a body's feet these mornin's out on the bare ground. I thought I wuz goin' to freeze in my tracks before I got ole Red an' the heifer stripped."

"Yes, hit's plum chilly," agreed Orlena, "an' they's plenty uv signs uv frost. I 'low they's been hard frosts up on the creeks an' the heads uv the hollers."

"Up about Granny Ann's an' Betty's an' sich places, an' over about Allen Bolin's, where mammy an' Sid an' me lived last," said Almetta, "an' don't you reckon them little sugar-trees at mammy's grave is red as blood now, Orleny?"

"I wouldn't wonder."

"I'd shore love to see hit before the leaves falls. I could walk an' go ef you'd let me."

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“Well, you can go one uv these days before long. We’ll dig the sweet taters, in two or three days, an’ then you can go. I ’low you better take to puttin’ your shoes on these cold mornin’s an’ evenin’s.”

“Well, I’ll git ’em out an put ’em on ef hit’s cold in the mornin’.”

“Shoes wuz harder to come by when I wuz a gal than they air now, Almetty, an’ many’s the mornin’ I’ve het me a little piece uv a plank to stand on whilst I milked to save wearin’ my shoes when hit were a heap colder than hit is now, though my pap wuz a well-doin’ man, an’ we allers had shoes; an old feller would come to the house an’ make ’em; but I’ve went bare-footed till near about New Year’s many a time when I wuz a gal.”

“Them wuz old fashioned times, wa’n’t they, Orleny? though I’ve seed gals warm boards to stand on when they milked. Say, Orleny, old Red is failin’ in her milk; she didn’t give but jist the flat tin bucket up to the ring.”

“Well, hit ain’t nothin’ unexpected, since she fit with Price’s old Pied an’ got her horn knocked off. She’ll begin to mend when that place heals.”

“Talkin’ about old Pied knockin’ her horn off reminds me uv a tale Uncle Ed’ard used to tell on old Patrick Ingold. Did you ever know old Patrick?”

“Yes, I’ve knowed old Patrick in an about a lifetime, I reckon. Bill Price’s woman up here is his gal, an’ he’s Heppy’s grandpap.”

“Yes, I knowed he were. Well, you know

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he's said to be crazy; but some folks says he's jist mean. Well, old Patrick come down by Uncle Ed'ard's one mornin' early, an' hollered an' axed Uncle Ed'ard ef he'd seed his cow go by thar; an' Uncle Ed'ard axed him, 'What kind uv a cow wuz she, Patrick?' An' Patrick says, 'Why, she wuz a sort uv a red pided cow, with a horn off next to the fence an' a tail 'bout as long as a piece uv rope.' "

"Yes, I've hyeard that told on old Patrick."

"Well, I reckon he shore said hit, but I've hyeard folks say he had quare actions and handled foolish talk so his folks could keep him on the county."

"Well, they hain't nothin' to hinder him from bein' quare. His pap an' mammy wuz own born cousins, an' both was quare to start with. Heppy puts me in mind uv that pore old woman a heap uv times. Pore little Heppy! I hain't seed none uv them folks sence the workin'. Teacy must be gone off som'ers."

"Yes, she's been up on the creek, she said. She driv her cows down by while I wuz at the milk-gap, an' said she'd be down arter while to help me bind my quilt ef I wanted her to, an' I told her I didn't care."

"Well, I'm goin' out now to finish choppin' the vines off'n that last row uv sweet taters; I'm afyeard they's a'ready frosted. You an Teacy can bind the quilt, an' we'll begin diggin' the taters to-morrow, an' then you can take your trip."

"Yander's Teacy now, crossin' the gap."

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“She must have somethin’ on her mind, takin’ sich a early start.”

Orlena waited to hear if Teacy had heard anything strange while up the creek, and then went off with her hoe. Almetta went to her box in the loft and brought her shoes, which she had put away after the “working,” and set them under the back side of her bed. She brought the diamond quilt, which only lacked the binding, and she and Teacy sat opposite each other just inside the door of the lower house, with the quilt between them, and worked leisurely and talked, and Emma Jane played on the porch, with the corn-cob doll.

Teacy did have something on her mind which she had come on purpose to discuss, but there was no cause for hurry, and it was some time before she turned the conversation quite naturally upon the “working” and the happenings of that day. After a while she remarked,

“I seed Hence while I wuz up the creek, an’ he wuz kinder mad because you wouldn’t have nothin’ to do with him that day at the workin’.”

“Who said I wouldn’t have nothin’ to do with him?”

“Why, he ’lowed you slighted him.”

“Well, I never slighted him, an’ he knows hit.”

“Well, hit ’peared like he sorter felt like you did.”

“I wouldn’t ’a’ slighted nobody at the workin’ ef I’d ’a’ wanted to, an’ I never had no call to slight Hence. He never done nothin’ to me.”

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"Well, he's got sort uv a pettish turn, Hence has."

"He jist allers wanted to be muched over," said the girl quietly.

"I'll inshore hit to be that away. He wuz at Bob's one day whilst I wuz up thar, an' me an' him wuz a-settin' out in the porch by ourselves, an' he kept runnin' on with his foolishness, an' he 'lowed the reason you didn't have more time fer him wuz easy to see; an' he 'lowed he wuz beknowinst to hit before he come to the workin'."

"Hence allers had a knowin' turn. I wonder what he 'lowed the reason mought be?"

"Well, he brought in somethin' 'bout Gran. He 'lowed he'd met up with you an' him goin' up the creek, that time Betty wuz ailin'. He says that Gran talked moughty friendly, but you wuz moughty dry, he says, an' he jist put hit down, he says that you thought three wuz a crowd."

"I've knowed two to be a crowd when t'other one wuz Hence."

"I'll inshore hit," said Teacy, with a knowing chuckle which was lost on Almetta. "He sorter talked like him an' you had been big sweethearts onct."

"Did he? What did he say?"

"Why, I never paid no strict 'tention to what he wuz sayin'. I knowed without an accident he wuz lyin'."

"What kind uv lie wuz he tellin'?" asked Almetta, with dawning suspicion.

"Well, he wuz jist runnin' on, havin' some kind uv fool talk about you an' him when you

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used to stay to Ann's." She paused and then went on, "Hit didn't sound the best in the world though."

"What did he say about us?" asked the girl.

"Why, I told you he sorter let on that you an' him wuz big sweethearts."

"Is that all he said?"

"Well, somethin' kindly like that. You know what kind uv talk a feller like Hence would be apt to have, I reckon."

Almetta had begun to dislike the woman's tone and manner.

"Now, Teacy Price, I want to know pime blank what he said."

"Well," said Teacy, "I wa'n't aimin' to tell you all he said, but ef you must be to know, he come right out an' said that Gran wuz welcome to you fer his part; that you'd been his woman allers ago, before you wuz Gran's. He made me swear not to tell hit. Said he liked you moughty well, an' wouldn't want to make you mad."

Teacy, who was in perfect good-humor herself, had expected the story to anger Almetta. While she thought it possibly true, she attached very little importance, and no blame whatever, either to the boy or to Almetta, of both of whom she was very fond. She did not judge herself by the moral law, and was lenient to others who did not use it in the ordering of their lives.

There were two things about the friendly little girl which the unmoral woman had no power of guessing; one was that a little "knocked about" girl who knew all the evil of

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nature, and so frankly forgave others, could and did choose to carry her own soul and body unspotted through the mire. The other was the height of passionate resentment which might possess a white soul.

Almetta had never been accused before.

Teacy looked up from her sewing expecting an angry denial, but the teasing smile which was broadening on her own face disappeared as she looked into Almetta's, which was white and drawn.

"Now, I wouldn't feel that away about hit, Almetty, ef I wuz you," she hastily began. "Of course I knowed he wuz lyin'. I never meant to tell you that last part, but you would be to have hit." The woman was alarmed, and as Almetta still did not stir nor speak, she hurried on vehemently, "I knowed he wuz bound to be lyin'; he's never been knowed to tell the truth. Don't take on that away, Sugar!" she begged to the silent, motionless girl. "I jist sorter told hit fer a little joke anyway. I don't think Hence meant hit to be believed. I know he didn't."

She would have gone on to belittle and finally to deny the whole thing ever having been said, but an angry flash from Almetta stopped her backward flight and left her speechless.

Almetta stuck her needle through the cloth and carefully wound the thread around it. Getting up she went to the back side of the bed, stooped and brought her shoes from under it. She slipped them on without stockings and tied them tightly.

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Teacy watched her in miserable, fascinated silence as she walked out to where a dusty old pair of saddle-pockets hung on the wall, and reaching in, brought forth a pistol. This she put in her apron, of which she made a "poke" by catching up the bottom, twisting it and tucking it in at the belt.

She took down her sunbonnet, and without a word even to answer Emma Jane's insistent, "Whar doin', Metty, whar doin'?" walked out and away.

Orlena came in just in time to see her going down the path to the gate and to hear Teacy swearing to herself gently but fervently.

"What's the matter, Teacy?" asked Orlena sharply.

"Well, me an Almetty wuz jist a-settin' here talkin', an' I wuzn't a-thinkin' about a thing in the world when she tuck the spell."

"Where has she started now?"

"To the head o' Gab'l, I do reckon."

"What's she started to the head uv Gabriel about?"

"Well, sir, we wuz a-settin' here talkin' perfect peaceable; an' the talk come up about Hence Duke. I spoke an' told her Hence wuz sorter mad at her; an' she kept insistin' on me tellin' her what Hence had been sayin' 'bout her. I tried ever' way in the world to git out o' tellin' her, but she would be to know, an' I had to tell her the talk he wuz handlin'."

"What sort uv talk?"

"Why, 'bout her an' him bein' sweethearts up on the creek, an' all uv a suddint she flew

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

mad; an' ef she ain't took Jimmy's pistol an' gone after Hence, I don't know the signs."

"Did she take the pistol?"

"She took 'er too, right out er them saddle-pockets; an' I reckon she aims to go till she finds 'im too. She put on her shoes."

"Teacy, hit 'pears to me that a great old woman like you might er had more sense!" Orlena spoke angrily. "An' I reckon you jist let her take that old pistol an' start without tryin' to stop her?"

"I begged her not to go," lied Teacy, "an' I wuz jist a-fixin' to go arter her when you come in. I'll go now an' bring her back."

"No, I'll go myself," said Orlena, taking up the hoe she had set in the corner. "I'll go the nigh cut an' come up with her a ways down the road. You stay here an' mind the place tell we git back."

"What air ye goin' to do with that hoe?"

"Well, ef anybody axes ye where I am, I'm gone a-sangin'."

"Hain't hit very late to sang?"

"Yes, hit's late to sang, but hit's late fer you to be overly particular about what you tell; besides, I *am* goin' sangin'."

Orlena cut across the field and caught up with the girl in a little while. They walked together some minutes in silence, but when Orlena suggested that they take a steep by-path across the hill, "as hit's a long ways to the head of Gabriel around by the road," Almetta protested that she did not want her to go at all.

Orlena said firmly, "Almetty, I'm a-goin'

## TEACY GOSSIPS

to see you through this. The varmint needs killin'." And she began the steep climb at rather a killing pace.

Almetta's strength was half consumed by hurt and anger, and half way up the steep mountain-side her knees gave way beneath her and she sank down. The angry spots which had followed the dead white had left her face, and she was pale except for the dark circles under her eyes. The sweat stood in fine beads upon her lip and forehead. She looked ten years older than the barefooted girl who had stood warming over the stove in Orlena's kitchen, telling jokes on old Patrick, a short hour ago.

"That's right," said Orlena, sitting down carefully beside her. "We'd better rest a while, an' this is a very good place." They sat in silence, and after a while Orlena said, "The last time Ann wuz at my place I come this fur on the way with her, an' we set right here an' rested. Hit's a very pretty fur-seein' place."

She fanned with her bonnet a few minutes and glanced occasionally at Almetta, who sat with closed eyes, white and rigid, bolt upright against a tree. After they had sat some time, and the girl's breathing had become quiet and natural, Orlena said, "Almetty, where do you 'low we'll find Hence?"

"Up about his pap's."

"Air you shore he's there?"

"Yes, him an' Jerry's Tom is in a job gittin' out ties off'n his pap's land, Teacy said."

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

"I wonder where that is? His pap's got a big boundary."

"They're workin' on the right fork uv the branch."

"Did Teacy say he wuz workin' there?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the place very well?"

"I've cow-hunted an' dug sang all over hit. Hit's jist above Uncle Ed'ard's." She still sat rigid with closed eyes.

"Oh, well, then, you'll know the way all right. But they's one thing we've got to be careful about. You don't want to git Sid mixed up in nothin'."

"They won't be nothin' to mix up in when I'm through."

"Air ye aimin' to kill all uv 'em?"

"All uv who?"

"All uv Hence's folks?"

"No."

"Well, hain't he got some brothers about the size uv Sid?"

"Yes, he's got two jist uv a size."

"Well, you reckon they won't sorter take hit up with Sid, ef you wuz to start trouble?"

"They mought."

"They's jist as shore to as hit's ever raised, an' arter the talk about settin' in the bushes, that Sid's already handled, I'd be sorter afyeard fer him."

"Orleny," said the girl fiercely, "I hain't never been no man's woman, an' Hence had ort to have to punish fer sayin' hit."

"Yes, darlin', he ort; an' he will some o' these

## TEACY GOSSIPS

days, without a doubt. Don't you never worry 'bout that. Hence is too headlong to ever see his way to the end; an' one uv these days somebody'll lay him cold; an' his pore old mammy, who is a very good old woman too, will set an' rock herself back'ards an' for'ards an' cry an' tell how good Hence allers was to her. Pore old woman, I feel moughty sorry fer her, but I don't see no remedy."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, and Orlena went on,

"Hit's mighty bad to have to stan', but sendin' a sinful soul to the judgment an' breakin' a old woman's heart an' startin' a young boy in trouble mought be a lot worse."

Almetta, down whose cheeks the tears were streaming, took the pistol from her apron and handed it to Orlena, who took it without comment, and tied it up in her own.

Moving nearer, she took the head and shoulders of the weeping girl in her arms and let the storm rise and spend itself unchecked except for an occasional, "Don't worry, darlin'."

At last Almetta lay quietly, and the tears were stanchd. Orlena plucked a twig and fanned her gently as she lay with her head on her lap.

"Now, Almetty," she began, "you've allers bore a good name, an' ever'body that is anybody, confidences you. You don't need to pay no 'tention to Hence's talk. He growed up a very civil, nice-appearin' boy, but he's tuck to follerin' bad ways an' he's lost his credit. They ain't nobody confidences him."

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

"Don't you 'low a heap uv people will believe his talk?"

"Well, some mought fer a while, but moughty few gits through this world without gittin' scandalized some; an' they ain't much profit in raisin' a furse about a pyore lie. You wouldn't 'a' help the cause airy grain by shootin' Hence's whole connection; folks wouldn't uv thought a bit higher uv you fer hit."

"Wouldn't they 'a' knowed in reason that I wouldn't shoot him over the truth?"

"No, honey. Innercent and Guilty has actions so much alike at times that they own granny can't hardly tell 'em apart. An' I never knowed a killin' to prove nothin' nor help nothin'."

"Hit mought help a body's feelin's."

"Well, that kind uv help ain't lasty; an' Hence'll be a heap wuss off carryin' his lie than you will livin' hit down. Did you ever have anythin' to do with him a-tall, Almetty?"

"Yes, me an' him did talk a little onct, when I wuz a-stayin' at Granny Ann's. You know they live very clost, jist up the Right-Hand Fork, a little ways above Granny's; an' he used to stop in passin', an' I liked him very well. When me an' him finally fell out Uncle Ed'ard tole me I'd lost a good chanct, that I ought to 'a' married him, but I wuzn't but thirteen years old, an' Granny bemeaned Uncle Ed'ard fer havin' sich talk, an' me so little an' young."

"What did you an' Hence fall out about?"

"Well, we hadn't railly talked much. I wanted to play an' didn't take much intrust in

## TEACY GOSSIPS

hit an' hadn't the fust idy uv bein' in yearnest."

"Wuz he in yearnest?"

"Well, he mought 'a' been, tho' I never paid much 'tention to hit tell finally he come thar one Christmas day an' brought candy an' apples an' stayed around all day. That evenin' me an' him walked down the road a way an' he give me a little brass ring, an' tried to buss me. I slapped him as hard as ever I could, an' hit made him moughty mad."

"Was that when you fell out?"

"No, I'd sorter slapped him in the eye a little. I never aimed to do that, an' when I seen I'd hurt him so bad I wuz sorry. I talked sorter good to him, but still I wouldn't let him buss me."

"What did you fall out about?"

"Well, I'll jist tell you how it wuz. Hit all happened between Christmases. It wuz Christmas day when I slapped him, an' jist twelve days arter that I drowned him."

"You drowned him?"

"Yes, sir. Hit wuz Old Christmas night an' a whole passel uv us wuz up at old Joel Bentley's, an' we wuz aimin' to sit up till midnight, telling ghost tales an' singin' ballads an' the like. We wuz aimin' to go to the barn at midnight to see ef the cattle wuz kneelin' down. We had hyeard old folks say that the cattle all knelt down an' lowed at midnight uv Old Christmas."

"Well, we wuz tellin' tales an' singin'. They wuz several uv us an' ever' now an' then some-

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

body would step out on the porch fer a drink er ter see the moonlight er somethin', an' nobody paid any 'tention to who wuz comin' er goin'. Along about eleven o'clock I stepped out fer a drink. I went to the upper eend uv the porch to throw out the water that wuz left in the gourd, an' there wuz Hence standin' there with his arms around Buddie's Sissy, an' she allers wuz give up to be the wust gal on the creek, an' they wuz bussin' an' smootchin'; that wuz before she married the fust time. The upper eend uv the porch is high off'n the ground, an' they wuz, in a manner, right under me. They didn't see me, an' I jist tiptoed back to the bucket an' got me a gourd full o' water, an' come back an' tuck a good aim an' spilled hit right slap-dab on 'em."

Almetta looked up into the woman's eyes, and both smiled as she continued.

"They ducked back under the eend uv the porch, an' I put up the gourd an' went back to the fire an' sorter laid over on Suze's lap an' shet my eyes.

"Well, they staid a few minutes an' didn't hear nobody laughin' ner nothin', an' jist thought hit wuz a accident an' nobody beknowin' to hit; an' they slipped in an' scrouged up to the fire. Jerry's Tom wuz playin' the dulcimo an' singin' 'Wild Bill Jones,' an' nobody noticed they wuz wet an' nothin' wuz said.

"I kep' my eyes shet tell I did go sound asleep; an' when they all started to the barn, at twelve o'clock, Suze had to wake me up.

"Well, the cattle wuz all down asleep, with

## TEACY GOSSIPS

their legs doubled up under 'em, an' some claimed they wuz kneelin', an' t'others claimed they wa'n't; an' all uv us that lived clost went home.

"Hence had brung me; an' I wuz afyeard to 'fuse to go home with him; but when he tried to talk an' buss me ag'in, hit made me so mad I could 'a' died. I tuck his little ring off an' told him hit faded so bad I's afyeard hit would pizen me, an' he'd better give hit to Sissy.

"Then he accused me uv throwin' the water on 'em, but I never owned hit untel I wuz safe on the porch at Granny Ann's an' the door open.

"He come the next day though, an' me an' him fussed ag'in, an' he has been sparkin' Sissy ever since, an' I believe she likes him. I wuz so good tickled at gittin' to drowned 'em, I never stayed mad a bit."

"Did he ever try to spark you any more?"

"No, not to say spark, but we've mostly got along very well, an' I allers counted him to be a friend."

Orlena sat waving the little twig a few minutes, and asked,

"Almetty, how did you know where that old pistol wuz?"

"Why, I remembered hangin' my sunbonnet on that same nail over that old pair uv saddle pockets onct, an' Jimmy come in an' lifted hit off, very careful, an' hung hit on another nail. I seed he had somethin' very particular in them pockets, an' I just 'lowed hit wuz the pistol. I hadn't seed her nowheres else about."

"Yes, she's laid in them old pockets fer fifteen

## *ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN*

year, an' never been discharged in the time uv hit. I do 'low she'd kick a body's brains out, ef they wuz to undertake to discharge her."

"Would they be any harm in jist lendin' her to Hence?" asked Almetta grimly.

"I'm afyeard hit would be a felonious act," said the woman.

"Hit would be a religious trick," said the girl.

## X

### ALMETTA DISAPPEARS

ORLENA had some difficulty in persuading Almetta to return to the same roof with Gran, but Hence's close neighborhood both to Betty and Granny Ann made it undesirable for her to go to either place, and Orlena pointed out that there was no other home into which she could go as a matter of course and unquestioned. She promised to see to it that Teacy did not talk, and thought that Gran need never know that the ugly things had been said.

On the way home Orlena dug a ginseng root which she had been meaning to go after for more than a year, and they arrived home before noon. Gran and Jimmy were unharnessing in the barn when they returned and Teacy was getting dinner.

Orlena displayed the sang root, a beautiful four-years' growth and put it to dry in a conspicuous place. She slipped the old pistol to its former resting-place, and Teacy, having disappeared, was dishing dinner when the men came in.

Almetta put away the quilt which Teacy had finished in her absence, and took off her shoes. She brought the milk and butter from the

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

spring, waited upon the table and ate the smallest "bite" herself when the others were through.

As Jimmy left the house he called back to her that she and Janie would have to move their playhouse out of the crib, as he was wanting to patch the floor before time to throw in the corn, and she had better move her books and Janie's "pretties."

It was a Saturday afternoon, and being well up with the work, Jimmy was off on his horse to look at a piece of property he was thinking of trading for, leaving Gran about an hour's work on the sled and the rest of the day to **himself**.

Gran noticed that Almetta looked white and tired, and whispered to her not to worry about the playhouse, that he'd bring in the things himself when he finished the sled. Her eyes filled with tears, and she could not help the trembling of her hands as he took them and asked anxiously if she were ill.

"I'll be all right," she whispered as she pulled away and began gathering up the plates. Orlena came with the dishwater, and he passed out reluctantly.

After the dishes were washed she took the child and went out to the crib. They had been there some time, and she had gathered all the things together in an old pasteboard box, and was sitting with her back against the wall; Emma Jane was fast asleep on the floor, and she was trying to read the stories in the Fifth Reader, and hoping that Gran would guess where she was and come, when she heard voices outside. She was surprised and shocked, on

## ALMETTA DISAPPEARS

looking through a crack, to see Gran standing at the corner of the new barn with Hence Duke.

What could Hence be doing here? and so earnestly engaged with Gran? Why, oh, why had she consented to come back?

Her face flamed, her heart throbbed. It seemed for a while as if they were examining something, and Gran put his hand in his pocket. But there were some planks leaning against the barn, and she could not see clearly what they were doing and could not hear the conversation.

After a while Hence turned away, and as he walked off, coming by the crib, paused, and she heard him say, "Well, Gran, she may not be no better than some others, but I thought a whole sight uv her when she wuz mine. Take good care uv her, an' ef you ever git tired uv her maybe I'll take her back."

Gran made no answer, and stood quietly watching Hence, who disappeared around the barn. He did not know that Almetta was in the crib and passed close by without stopping on his way to the house. Almetta could see that he wore a troubled countenance.

She had no doubt, from Hence's last word, that the talk was about herself, and felt like screaming, "O Gran, hit's all a lie!" but she was sick and could scarcely breathe. She lay on the crib-floor a long time, numb with pain, but after a while her brain cleared, and she planned what seemed to her the only thing left her to do.

She took a short pencil from the pasteboard

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

box, and writing a note to Orlena on the fly-leaf of her book, propped it open against the wall with a cob. She touched Emma Jane's hair with her hand, and selected an article from the box, as if she would take it, and then put it back. She propped the door open, so that it could not swing to, making a prisoner of the child, and herself walked out and away.

When Gran reached the house he found Orlena alone, and he began to tell her of his interview with Hence.

"I'm afyeard I've played an awk'ard fool trick on myself," he said ruefully, at the same time displaying a plated gold watch which, though showing signs of wear, was ticking away merrily and was apparently in good condition.

"How did you come by 'er?" asked Orlena.

"Well, Hence Duke come by a while ago an' seen me out in the barn-lot. I was on my way to help Almetty clean out the corn-crib, an' he come over in the lot an' offered me the watch fer ten dollars."

"Did you give him ten dollars fer her?"

"No, I never give him no ten dollars, but I offered him three, an' after so long a time we traded."

"Did he come over here a-purpose to sell you that watch?" Orlena spoke with apparent unconcern, but she had some anxiety over the interview.

"No, I don't 'low he did. He wuz a-passin' and seen me in the barn-lot, an' he wuz anxious to git shet uv 'er. Said he wuz needin' the money. Ef I hadn't been wantin' one fer so

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long I wouldn't 'a' teched hit. He told a very straight story about gittin' hit in a trade, but I'm axshly afyeard he stole hit, or either he's runnin' off f'm some other meanness, an' needin' a little money moughty bad."

"I'll inshore hit to be one er t'other," agreed the woman.

"He 'lowed hit to be the best watch in the world. I told him I'd seed better—though I don't know where hit wuz." Gran grinned ruefully and added, "I jist didn't want to stand his braggin'. I'm axshly afyeard hit's a costly watch."

"She's very pretty," said Orlena, taking it in her hands.

"I could see he thought moughty high uv her. I believe he a little bit thinks he'll try to buy her back one uv these days. As he wuz a-leavin' he charged me to take good care uv her."

"My advice would be to trade her the fust chance. It might be awk'ard to be ketched in possessions uv her."

"I wisht I hadn't bought the fool thing. Maybe I can come up with Hence som'ers an' git him to take her back. I wuz aimin' to help Metty, but I believe I'll go off down the road an' see ef Hence has stopped anywheres."

He was gone till suppertime, but had not come up with Hence.

Out at the crib Emma Jane slept long and soundly and awoke refreshed. She sat up and looked about for some time, and then seeing the open book against the wall, scrambled up, got it, and laid it, closed, alas! on the geography

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

with the speller, thus losing the note Almetta had written for Orlena. From the box of pretties she selected a broken piece of flowered china, and then backed herself, crawfish fashion, out of the open door and dropped easily to the ground; evidently she had done it before.

An hour later Orlena, going to call Almetta, found the child sitting in the edge of the woodpile, leisurely scraping in the soft earth with the bit of flowered china.

"Emmy, where's Almetty?" she asked.

"Huh?" said the little one, cheerfully.

"Where is Metty, Sugar?"

"Huh?" she repeated.

"Don't you know where Almetty is?"

"Me not," was the still cheerful rejoinder.

Then Orlena called, "Almetty, Almetty," but there was no answer.

She went to the crib and looked in, climbed the ladder of the old barn, and looked in the almost empty loft, and coming down called again, but there was no answer. She tried the new barn, but found no one.

"Her gone," said Emma Jane wisely and emphatically.

"Where has she gone, Sugar?" coaxed Orlena, and put the little one through a line of suggestive questions, but it was useless, the child did not know.

Orlena was more troubled than she admitted to herself, and kept saying, "Well, she'll come in arter a while, from som'ers." She tried to stop looking for her, and went about getting supper; but a long search which was to be con-

## ALMETTA DISAPPEARS

ducted without admitting it to the world had begun. And the great sadness of it was knocking premonitorily at the woman's heart.

When Jimmy and Gran missed the girl at supper-time, Orlena said calmly, "Well, she's been wantin' to visit her mother's grave before all the leaves fell, an' I told her this mornin' she could go. Hit's a very good time to spare her now; the fodder's all in. She may go to see Betty before she comes back."

"Well, the sweet taters is not in," grumbled Jimmy.

"I'll git the sweet taters in. Teacy is owin' me some."

"I wuz expectin' on havin' her help gether the corn," said Jimmy crossly.

"Maybe she'll not take up," said Orlena smoothly.

Gran felt altogether discomfited that the girl should have gone off without mentioning it and with no word of good-by. He felt inclined to resent Orlena's not mentioning it. He couldn't understand it; but something in Orlena's manner made him know she was following the girl's wishes.

He started to work with Jimmy the next morning, disconsolate, having found Orlena altogether noncommittal in regard to Almetta's sudden departure and almost curt in her manner of dismissing the subject.

As soon as the men were out of sight Orlena went to the bars and called Teacy Price. She intimated that Almetta had gone up about Ann's and Betty's, but she scolded Teacy and

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

blamed her, and gave orders that she was to ask no questions and have nothing to say about the girl. Teacy was really grieved, and “ ’ponned her honor, she hoped she might die right there in her tracks, ef she ever let on to knowing a thing er axed a question, and she’d have no part in norating a miration about hit.”

Orlena, knowing the girl was upset and fearing she might be ill, felt like starting off somewhere to look for Almetta and try to bring her back, but reasoned that whatever had taken her away, she herself could not help matters by following now, especially as she might go in the wrong direction. She had never thought that she would really commit violence, and was confident that she would not even think of it now; but she was not so sure about Gran. She hoped Hence was leaving the country, as Gran had suspected, and that this matter might be kept from the latter, at least until Hence was safely away.

Her heart was full of a strange uneasiness, and she longed to know the whereabouts of the girl whom she found herself loving so dearly.

When Mary Betts came on an errand Orlena forestalled inquiry by asking,

“Did you see Almetty goin’ up to Betty’s yesterday?” but Mary, who had come on business and left in a hurry, had not seen her.

Orlena spent the next few days digging sweet potatoes. The patch was next to the road, and she managed to have a talk with every one that passed, but no one mentioned having seen Almetta.

## ALMETTA DISAPPEARS

She found it impossible to rest easy without knowing something definite, and had about made up her mind to go to Gabriel Angel for help, when on the afternoon of the third day after Almetta disappeared the old man rode by and stopped. She was at home alone, and she told him all she knew and her great uneasiness, and he undertook to look about. Doubtless she would be easy to find, and he would bring her word, if he didn't actually bring Almetta herself.

"I don't scarcely believe she's gone up Gabriel to Ann's nor Betty's. Mary Betts was here yesterday an' hadn't seed her pass. But she mought be across the hill f'm Betty's, on Prickly Ash, at Lang Bolin's place."

"What would she be at Lang's fer?"

"Well, you ricollect her mammy died an' wuz buried there."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, she wuz a-sayin' to me the very mornin' before she left, before any uv this come up, that she'd like to go an' see her mother's grave before the leaves fall an' see ef the fence wuz up good around hit, an' I told her she could go right now in a day er two."

"Oh, well then," said the old man, "I wouldn't give myself no more trouble about hit; thar's right whar she is, an' I'll jist ride on up an' git 'er. Hit ain't more'n a couple o' miles beyant my place."

"Well, I hope you'll find her. I can't hear uv a soul that's seed her, but thar's a very good trace all the way from here to the head uv

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Prickly Ash, along the tops uv the ridges, an' I 'low she's kept to hit."

"Shore, shore, she's went to Lang's an' then maybe on over to Betty's to see how they come on."

"Well, wherever you find her, don't fret her to come back. Jest tell her that I told you to tell her, ef you happened to see her, to take her time an' have her visit out, an' come back whenever she's ready, an' me an' her'll piece the Rosy quilt."

Gabriel Angel arrived at Lang Bolin's an hour before dark, as they were sitting down to supper, and knew before the meal was over that they had not seen Almetta.

As they sat on the tiny porch after supper, he asked if any one lived in the little house up in the Cove now.

"No, hit's stood empty fer a long time. The whipperwills wuz moughty bad to holler around hit, an' sence they has been a grave so clost, people complains uv its bein' lonesome," Lang said, and added that his wife had declared just the day before that she had seen "a white-look-in' somethin' slippin' 'round up thar," but he had just laughed at her.

The next morning Uncle Gabriel said he was going across the ridge to Gabriel on a little business, "an' he 'lowed he'd sorter stop in passin' an' take a look at Talithy's grave, to see ef hit wuz in proper shape."

He took the bridle-path which led across the hill from the head of the little branch called Prickly Ash, to the Left-Hand Fork of Gabriel,

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more than half-way to the top. He hitched his horse and made his way through the rank growth of purple asters, golden rod and trailing red bittersweet, over the edge of the cove to the little grove of sugar-trees where the grave of Talitha Angel lay.

“Well, she’s shore been here,” he said, as he stood leaning against the rude rail-pen that enclosed it.

Nature had adorned the pen with soft gray, green festoons of the wild clematis, which had woven itself in and out of the rails and gone to seed in feathery masses. But a human hand had cleared the little enclosure of weeds and placed the bunches of scarlet leaves among the “farewell summers” upon the grave. Gabriel stood and looked a long time, and then taking off his hat and bowing his head on the fence, he prayed aloud for the young girl.

He turned at last and went to the cabin. On the hearth he found a little bunch of dry twigs and a handful of dead leaves, with two or three matches from which the sulphur had been scraped. She had evidently found them in some familiar cranny and vainly tried to ignite them. She must have spent the first night in the cabin, and Gabriel shook his head sadly and suffered for what he felt she must have endured of cold and hunger. At the spring there were traces of slim, bare feet, and there he knew she had been refreshed.

He found no sign of her present whereabouts nor in what direction she had gone, but he believed she had crossed over the ridge to

## *ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN*

Gabriel's Branch and that he would soon find her.

He spent the rest of the day making apparently casual visits at Betty's, Ann's, and even at Hence's father's. A number of persons asked him when he'd seen Almetta. He told them all quite carefully that he had seen her "jist t'other day, an' she wuz lookin' moughty well." They offered no information. He inquired for the health of the ailing and old all the way down the creek, and more than one woman brought him a dipper of water to the fence and inquired if he had "hyeard anything new or strange" and was questioned in turn, but he neither saw nor heard of Almetta.

'Twas long past the middle of the afternoon before he arrived at Jimmy's horse-block, where Orlena met him with an anxious face. "No," he said, "he hadn't found her, though by the signs she was bound to have been at her mother's grave." He told Orlena the details of the trip and admitted that he was troubled, though there were still places that she could be. Gabriel had gathered that Hence Duke had left the country, but they neither one believed his leaving had anything to do with Almetta's disappearing. He and Orlena both thought it best to keep the occasion of Almetta's disappearance from Gran for a while yet, as Hence might still be lurking about.

Jimmy should be told at once.

"Of course she was apt as not to come back herself at any time," declared Gabriel.

"Pray God she will!" said Orlena fervently,

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and they both looked away up to the top of the ridge by which they were sure she had gone.

There seemed nothing to do now, but Gabriel said he would be back in a few days, and if she had not returned nor been heard from, they would plan what, if anything, should be done.

Many a girl had disappeared from her own father's home without causing so much distress. Even Jimmy, who usually paid little attention to the "help" other than to get all the work out of them he could, and pay them their just dues, was genuinely distressed.

"Do you reckon she mought 'a' gone with Hence?" he questioned Orlena.

"Naw, she never went with Hence."

"Well, she wuz a nice little critter, an' not a grain underfoot. I hope she don't come to no harm."

When Gabriel returned Orlena had thought over every place that Almetta had ever mentioned as having lived since her father's death.

"Her an' her ma and Sid had lived about, arter her paw died, wherever they wuz work to be had, an' she knowed a heap uv people an' seemed to feel moughty friendly to most uv 'em."

"She never seed no strangers," said Gabriel, "an' wa'n't bold nuther."

"Now as to her folks," continued Orlena, "she's jist got one sister livin' besides Betty."

"That's all, an' she lives in Tennessee."

"Yes, an' Almetty don't know whereabouts, nor she don't know where none uv the oldest boys is. She told me jist here t'other day that she hadn't hyeard from Lize nor them oldest

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boys in allers, an' I don't believe she'd 'a' started bareheaded an' barefooted to find none uv them."

"Well, I'll take my time, sorter, an' try to git 'round to all them places you say she's talked most about."

"Well, Gabriel, I hate the idy of you undertakin' to do so much traipsing 'round; an' ef the gal hadn't 'a' been so wrecked in her mind over Hence's talk that mornin', I wouldn't be to see you do it; but somehow my heart's plum sore an' I can't rest. Of course Jimmy will help some, an' Gran too, when he has to be told. I ain't expectin' her to be found easy."

"Now, Orleny, honey, don't worry," said the old man; "she's honest an' afyeard uv nothin', an' the Good Old Man will not be misput to take care uv her; an' I don't mind the traipsin'. I traipses a heap anyhow."

They parted with heavy hearts, Orlena to her round of daily cares and a habit quickly formed of coming to the door to observe every one that passed, and standing long minutes, shading her eyes with her hand, gazing first up the road where the bunch of white-oaks cut off the view, and then down to where the road curved with the river out of sight.

Gabriel took the road again. He took it many times, and in so many different directions, before the deep snows of winter set in, that people began to wonder if the old man wasn't beginning to be "a little quare." When he let two of his near neighbors almost go to law over a trifling matter before he took

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thought to intercede, it was rumored that the old man "must have somethin' on his mind."

Of Almetta little mention was made. It was usual for a girl without strong family ties to shift around from one neighborhood to another. Her friends on the head of Gabriel supposed she was down on the river somewhere, and Orlena's neighbors—save Teacy Price—supposed she was somewhere about the head of the creek.

Her sister Betty, to whom, as the weeks went by with no sign of the girl's whereabouts, it was thought best to tell the situation, was not disturbed. She said "Almetty had always been independent, and would turn up all right before long." She acquiesced in keeping silence in regard to her, agreeing that it might cause unpleasant talk, Hence being missing too.

Betty really believed the girl had gone with him, and did not care.

When it seemed to be certain that Hence was clear of the country Orlena told Gran the whole story, of what Almetta had heard from Teacy, of what she had done, and of their conversation the morning before she left, and how reluctant Almetta was to return.

He was deeply affected, but asked few questions as Orlena told the story.

"I know now she was in the crib, Orleny, an' seed him talkin' to me. I hadn't seed her come out; I reckon she come out whilst I had stepped out to the barn fer somethin'. I reckon she thought he wuz tellin' me his meanness, an' when I didn't strangle him in his tracks she

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'lowed I wuz a-believin' hit. Pore little gal! Ef I could jist git my fingers on Hence's neck now!"

A dull color burned on his cheeks and his hands were clenched. After a while he said quite simply,—

"Orleny, she had been talkin' to me a little grain sence the workin'."

"Had she, brother?"

"Yes, a little. She wuz very techy an' independent, but I could tell she wuz a-likin' me."

Orlena told him how everything possible was being done to find her. After that his work was poor and fitful, but Jimmy "looked over it." He was gone for weeks at one time, with nothing to say for himself on his return. They did not know whether he had been searching for Almetta or Hence, but guessed it might have been both.

In the meantime he had been served with a warrant of arrest for stealing the watch, but there had been a hitch somewhere, and after giving bail he was never summoned to appear for trial. He heard that Hence had bragged that he would give that "fine gentleman" a little trouble before he left the country.

Hence was occasionally heard from from another State, but with no mention of Almetta.

As the fall wore on and early winter set in, Orlena urged Gabriel to give up the search. She had given up hope of finding the girl by searching and began to fear for the old man's health.

Winter set in, and the night of the first deep

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snow Gabriel Angel stopped in at dark. The snow had already begun to fall, and he was easily persuaded to spend the night. After supper he sat leaning upon his staff, gazing into the fire.

"Have you been lookin' fer Almetty ag'in, Gabrel?" asked Orlena.

"Yes, I had about give up lookin' fer her an' hadn't been out fer some time, but I shore thought I had a trace uv her this time. But I reckon hit were a mistake," he said wearily.

"How wuz hit?"

"Well, I hyeard uv a gal named 'Angel' up about the Raccoon bend neighborhood, away up the river, but when I got thar the folks had moved off. When I axed about the fam'ly they spoke uv the Angel gal, an' described Almetty pime blank, but her name wuz Talithy. Hit's sort uv a fam'ly name with the Angels."

"Yes, an' some uv 'em is wonderful fair-skinned too, with them same blue eyes an' yaller hair, like Almetty."

"Well," said Jimmy, "on one excuse or another I reckon we have give ever'body in miles uv here a chanct to tell hit, ef they knowed whar she wuz, unless hit wuz old Harm France on Catamount Ridge, an' he's deaf an' couldn't hear ef he wuz axed, an' dumb an' couldn't tell ef he knowed. But, mates," he went on, "I'm shore lookin' fer her back. She's little an' light an' could slip betwixt harm an' danger without tippin' airy one! Yes, sir, I'm expectin' her back!"

"Well," said Gabriel sadly, "I don't know.

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I'm beat myself. I'll resign my commission. She's either dead or gone cl'ar out of our reach, an' we'll jist have to wait the Old Man's time to reveal her whereabouts or to return her."

No one spoke, and he went on: "She wuz a well-turned, beau-ti-ful child, with a character sweet as the lilies uv summer an' pyore as the snows uv winter, an' she's in the hands uv God."

Gabriel spoke in elevated terms as of the departed, and it was the first time she had been spoken of in the past tense.

Gran felt it like a stab, and walked out and sat on the kitchen porch in the cold, sobbing miserably.

"I never had a gal about me that I loved like I loved her! Pore little Almetty!" Orlena's face was wet with streaming tears.

Emma Jane in Orlena's bed stirred and called in her sleep, "Metty, Metty."

"God bless hits little heart! Hit calls 'Metty, Metty,' all the time, but Metty's gone."

They sat in silence for a long time. At last Orlena went to the door and called to Gran. "Come on in to the fire, brother; hit's gittin' moughty cold." She held the door open until he came in. "I'll put another piece uv kiver on this other bed in here; an' you an' Uncle Gabrel can lay right in here by this fire. Hit's gone out in the t'other house."

It was not only the cold but the loneliness she dreaded for the broken-hearted boy.

A while before midnight Jimmy had got up to mend the fire, when he stepped to the door to

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see if the snow was still falling. He noticed no sound, but Gran, who had slept only fitfully, sat up suddenly.

“What’s that quare noise I hear, Jimmy?” he said.

“I ain’t hyeard nothin’,” said Jimmy, but having walked out on the porch, he returned quickly, saying, “Come out here, Gran; I believe somebody’s havin’ trouble in the river.”

It was true enough. Some one had missed the ford and was struggling in the water. The whole house was astir in a minute and out.

Jimmy and Gran put out in the boat, Orlena and Gabriel standing on the bank in the snow. Soon a horse, with the saddle dragging to one side, struggled out of the river and up the steep bank, just as Gran seized the body of a man as it came up what seemed to be the second time, though the snow-clouds made the seeing poor.

Jimmy pulled the boat into shore, and Orlena hurried in and had a blanket on the floor in front of the fire when the men came in with their burden; Gran was really carrying him.

“Lay him right here, brother,” she directed.

“He may be alive, but he shore carries like a dead man,” Gran said quietly as he deposited his burden upon the floor. The yellow firelight glistened upon the wet, pallid face, and all stood still in their places. Gran was stooping with one arm of the man still in his grasp. He laid it down gently and turned away as Orlena murmured, “Pore little Hence!”

The three other people worked faithfully with the body, Gran fetching and carrying obe-

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diently and almost burning the house, keeping up the fire, but the faint flicker of life could not be coaxed to rise, and at the turn of the night he died.

Bill Price went for his people and the next afternoon his body was taken away.

Gran, who had not spoken a friendly word to Teacy Price since Orlena had told him of her thoughtless gossip, went back in the house after helping to put Hence's coffin on the wagon, and found her sitting on the wood-box sobbing convulsively into her apron. Gran came and stood by her, laying a hand upon her shoulder.

"Teacy!" he said. The woman, who had been crying all day as she worked feverishly at first one thing and then another, raised her swollen, tear-stained face to him.

"What is it, Gran?" she asked dully.

"Teacy, I don't reckon any uv us can expect to see little Almetty any more this side uv Heaven, but I've had to forgive Hence, an' I don't wish you no harm."

"Gran, I'd go to the eend uv the world on my knees, ef I knowed which way to start to bring her back."

"Well, Teacy, I'm afyeard we'll not git to bring her back, an' I'm thinkin' we'll have to spend a good deal uv time on our knees ef we ever mean to go to her."

"I've prayed, an' I've prayed," she sobbed, "an' I've cried my heart out," and after a convulsed silence she added, "an' that ain't all."

"What ain't all?" asked the boy gently.

"I ain't done a wrong thing sence she went

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away, Gran, an', so help me God, I never will. Orleny has read the Bible to me and God has forgive me my sins, an' I'm a changed woman; but, oh, if I could see Almetty one more time while I live!"

## XI

### GRAN LEAVES FOR THE WEST

**T**HE winter settled cold, with rough weather, and there was little stirring out by the people of Gabriel Run or Creely Creek or even along the river.

The men who worked at the timber observed short hours; and many a family up and down the creeks spent the whole of the stormy days in little windowless houses, with the doors shut, the fireplaces furnishing light, heat and ventilation. There was much time for talk, and many an old tale was retold and deeds of daring and adventure recounted. Gossip lost nothing in the telling, and anybody that brought news, or a song or a story, was welcome.

Bibles and almanacs, fiddles, banjos and dulcimers, came into requisition where there was a book or an instrument and any one to read or play; though there was many a home in which a fiddle or banjo was not allowed to come, their association with the dance being too intimate.

Politics with its binding ties and religion with its shades of "doctrine" furnished matter for serious discussion or argument. Many a tale was told of the river, which in summer the children waded, but which in the time of tide came down a foaming mass, bearing on its bosom to

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the outside market the timber, every log of which was known to its owners as intimately as the face of a friend, and could be sworn to in court if necessary.

The river, with its "bottomless holes" and swirls and shoals, where stalwart men had won through or lost their logs and labor, and perhaps their lives; where desperate rescues had been effected after untoward accidents, or battles fought over their choice of a landing. The river was not only the great artery of commerce but the center of romantic adventures; and Granny Price would leave off for the time her plaint of fear that the "Dimocratic President," elected in November, would order her pension stopped, to hear Bill tell of his prowess in taking long rafts through the "White Pine Shoal," or brag that on the next tide he and Gran would take out the finest raft that ever floated the river.

Everything came in for discussion in these shut-in times: and the inner details of killing scrapes, which able lawyers had tried, by fair means or foul, to get before juries, and had failed, were known and discussed freely by many a fireside, both of friends and enemies; while the escapades of moonshining and confederating were common jests.

Of the news items which trickled in to the family at the mouth of Gabriel's Run, one was to the effect that a man over in another county had been tried for killing a cousin of Jerry Taulbee's over a card-game the previous summer and had been "penitentiariied" for life,

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Jerry being the main witness against him. He was said to be the very man who had ridden through the country during the last fall inquiring about calves but buying none. There seemed little doubt that he had shot at the school teacher or had it done. It was said that he had stayed hidden out from home most of the time until cold weather had driven him in, and had been arrested in his own kitchen at last.

Jerry Taulbee had made no enemies at the mouth of Gabriel's Run, and people were generally satisfied at hearing that his assailant was "sent up for life."

They talked it over, and chuckled at how Orlena had protected Jerry and fooled them all. Jerry himself wrote Orlena a nice letter, telling her that he was leaving for the West, and thanking her for her kindness.

Jimmy, who was of a restless, out-door nature, found excuse to take a few trips, and knocked about out of doors a good deal, but Gran found more condolence in Orlena than any one; and many a long talk they had as he turned an ax-handle or mended his shoes, while she knit the heavy woollen stockings that were worn both winter and summer.

She drew him out to talk of his early life and his mother, of his home and "Miss Sally," and the folk of "Roaring Fork." She told him of John, her smartest best boy, for whom the little empty house had been built and who had died of a fever; and many things of interest that she had seen or heard; and gave him much good

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counsel. They talked of many things, but ever the conversation turned back to Almetta. Sometimes they spoke of her as if she had died, but other times as if the spring might bring her back.

Bill Price and Gran were to take out Jimmy's fine, big raft of oak and chestnut timber, when the big waters came in the spring, and Gran had made up his mind to go West at that time. He told Orlena of it one evening, after Jerry Taulbee's letter came, as he sat by the fireside tacking soles on his shoes.

"I'm shore goin', Orleny," said Gran. "Almetty left on account uv me, an' she may be stayin' away on the same account. I'm goin' to git clear out uv the country, an' maybe she'll come back to you. Ef she does, you may tell her I love 'er an' trust 'er, an' ef she ever feels like she wouldn't mind seein' me you can let me know, an' I'll come back from wherever I be; but ef hit would pester her, I'll never set foot in the country ag'in."

Orlena hated the thought of losing Gran too, but there might be something in his reasoning, and he was so disconsolate here that a Western trip might do him good—she had no doubt but that he would eventually return—so she made no strong objection.

"I'm a-goin' ter make everythin' as right as I can before I go away," he said. "Jake Singleton says he knows pime blank where Hence got the watch; he brung hit from below last spring, an' I'll jist take hit back an' hunt up the owner as I go. I hain't afeard uv takin'

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my chances on bein' locked up fer hit, an' I'll jist stan' to lose my three dollars."

"Well, I believe hit would be all right fer you to take hit back," said Orlena.

"They's another little matter I'm aimin' to fix up too. I wuz a-tellin' Almetty last summer, while me an' her wuz a-makin' the tater hills, about the time pap caused me to kill a couple uv old Sizemore's shoats, an' he undertuck to have pap jailed on account uv 'em.

"Pap told mam, a long time atterwards, that he could a spared the price uv 'em an' been contented, but he didn't 'low to lay in jail over no man's lean hogs."

"What did he want 'em killed fer?" inquired Orlena, who had never heard the story.

"Well, they kept a-breachin' on us an' wuz a-destroyin' a sight uv young corn an' needed killin' very bad."

"Hogs is moughty hateful that away at times," said Orlena sympathetically.

"Yes, an' I never give no thought to payin' fer 'em till jist lately; but ef I'm a-goin' to leave the country I'd ruther to leave no debts ner no grudges behind me: an' I believe at the last pap hisself would 'a' liked to 'a' had them hogs paid fer. Mam said he got moughty pleasin' jist before he died.

"I'd allers felt sorter hard at him fer the whoopin' he give me over killin' 'em—an' me not seein' no jestice in hit—an' now I'd sorter like to do somethin' that would 'a' pleased him before I leave. I reckon I wuz a little at fault anyhow; I wuz pyorely keen to git to kill 'em."

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“I’ll inshore you wuz,” said Orlena, smiling.

“Mam wuz a-talkin’ to me a whole lot about pap the last time I wuz at home. I wuzn’t there when he died; I wuz over on the Roarin’ Fork drivin’ a log-team fer Uncle Jim. They had come very high waters an’ a body couldn’t scarcely travel a-tall, an’ they couldn’t go atter me. Pap wuz dead an’ buried before I knowed he wuz bad off. I knowed he had been ailden, but I never knowed he wuz dangerous.

“Mam said he called ’em all ’round him the day before he died an’ told how he wanted ’em all to do. He give ’em a whole lot uv good counsel an’ told ’em he wanted ’em to meet him in heaven.”

“That was moughty nice,” said Orlena.

“Yes, he ’lowed he never had follered gittin’ drunk, nor hadn’t never killed nobody—but one man that kinder got him hemmed up an’ what you mought say compelled him to kill him. He said he hadn’t done nothin’ to punish fer, an’ he wa’n’t afyeard to die. He told ’em all to be good to mam, an’ what he wanted done with ever’thing. He told mam to keep the shot gun over the fireboard as long as she lived, an’ then he wanted me to have her. He ’lowed I had the best eye amongst ’em.

“Atter he talked to ’em all, mam says he had ’em all put out but the two main oldest boys, an’ then he told ’em they’d better sell the still.”

“He did have a moonshine still then?” asked Orlena.

“Yes, but he told ’em he’d been studyin’ on

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hit a heap, an' whilst he had never done no wrong stillin' on hit hisself, hit wuz a dangerous business fer them that didn't understand pime blank how to follow hit; an' he 'lowed he sorter thought hit wuz wrong to engage in anythin' that a body mought git hurt at; and 'twas ag'in' the law anyhow! He told 'em that old man Sizemore had been wantin' to buy hit, an' hit mought make fer peace betwixt the families jist to let him have her, an' save trouble. He said he believed in bein' peaceable jist as fur as you could, an' mam says pap allers wuz peaceable as long as he wuz let alone.

"He told 'em to pay any little debts he mought be a-owin', an' he mentioned one er two that he claimed he didn't rightly owe an' had been 'fusin' to settle. He told 'em that ef anybody had the heart to put in a claim fer 'em, jist to pay 'em; he said they'd make 'em pay 'em anyhow, an' him not thar.

"Mam says he wuz allers a master hand to foller his own way uv doin' right, an' hit warn't allers accordin' to strict law, but when he come to die, 'peared like he wanted ever'body satisfied. Hit's been a heap uv satisfaction to mam."

Not long after this talk with Orlena, Gran went to his mother's for a visit. He told her to take care of what "property" (stock) he had on the home place, an' ef he was not back in a year, to use or sell according to her needs.

He was unusually kind and gentle with his younger sisters and gave them much good advice. The virtues which he enjoined upon them

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to practice were those he had seen and loved in Almetta.

He had a neighborly visit with the Sizemores, took upon himself the whole blame of the killing of the shoats, and paid for them.

From home he went on into "town" and came back to Jimmy's with a new telescope for his baggage, new shoes and a "few little tricks" he thought he would need. He had brought Orlena a present, and for Emma Jane a "pop-pet" with hair, such as he had seen in the shop windows "below."

After this he was impatient to be off; but he had promised Jimmy to stay and help Bill Price take out the big raft, which was a very valuable one, and the "tide" was very slow in coming.

There was a good deal of rain, and the water rose a number of times; but always short of the "river-men's" marks for log-raft water.

A few tie-rafts were sent out, but only an occasional one got through the shoals. It was the last of March before "full waters" came, and all up and down the river the cables holding the great log-rafts were untied.

Then the river and its banks were alive with men and women and children and great excitement prevailed. Every able-bodied man and grown boy, and some not grown, were in some way interested in the rafts of logs and railroad ties tied up along its banks.

Even Gran's heavy heart responded to the exhilaration in spite of its every-day burden and the added sorrow of the partings. He had corresponded with Jerry Taulbee, and arranged

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to go to him, in the West, after the first tide.

Sid Angel had begged to go down on the tide and Uncle Gabriel had reluctantly consented for him to go with Bill and Gran.

Jimmy had ridden to the railroad on horseback, and would be at the bank "below," probably with a buyer, when the raft arrived. It had been put together on a sand-bar, a mile above the house, and it looked very handsome as it floated by with Bill and Gran at the oars, one at each end, and the excited boy waving good-by to Uncle Gabriel and Orlena and Emma Jane.

Poor Orlena felt quite bereft. She had been up long before daylight and had packed them a generous dinner of fried bacon and hobby bread, with apple pie and a pot of coffee, in a stout wooden box.

The day was bright and warm, and Sid splashed about, getting his feet wet with great unconcern in what appeared to him a true man-nish fashion.

"Hain't yo' feet moughty wet, brother?" asked Gran of him, as he stood churning the water in his shoes.

"Uhuh!" he responded cheerfully.

The men gave the boy turns at the oars in the "retches" (reaches) and pointed out places of interest of which he had heard.

Along after dinner, as the afternoon wore on, it became apparent that the river was not so full as they thought, and the water was going out so fast that they must needs go with it or be hung up. They agreed without discussion that they would take no risks with so large a raft,

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but would run all night, without even tying up anywhere for supper.

A chill, misty east wind sprang up in the late afternoon, and Sid, who had been hailing persons upon the bank and the men who had passed them on lighter, swifter rafts, fell silent, and with his hands in his pockets sat as high and dry as he could upon a huge log in the middle of the raft.

“Air ye cold, brother?” asked Gran, sympathetically.

“Not much,” he answered cheerfully.

At dark the wind laid, but it was cold and misty. Gran declared he had stuffed himself so at dinner that he wasn't a bit hungry; and Bill and Sid ate what had been left in the box. It made scarcely a full supper for either, as they had divided with a couple of men who had come out to them in a boat and had travelled with them the better part of the day.

The mist made it necessary to keep a sharp lookout, and conversation ceased. Sid stretched out upon his log, but after a fitful nap sat up hugging his knees.

“Air ye hongry, brother?” called Gran.

“No,” answered the boy, remembering that Gran had had no supper at all.

About midnight, after the light of a full moon had struggled through the fog, a small light raft, floating rapidly, came by with a couple of half-drunken men in charge. It came in front of their raft just as they entered a narrow chute, and the tipsy oarsmen failing to hold it straight with the current, it turned suddenly sideways,

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and as Bill afterwards described it, "jist whiffed around eend fer eend and bowed the bank." Gran's raft jamming squarely against it at this minute, it "buckled" up in the middle, breaking squarely in two and throwing the two tipsy men into the river.

Gran and Bill had all they could do to keep their own heavy raft off the bank, and only looked back in time to see that the men had crawled ashore and that half of the raft was jammed between the shore and a great rock and the other was floating after—apt to be a dead loss to the owner and a menace to other rafts.

By the time Bill and Gran had righted their raft and were running smoothly they were wet with sweat. Sid scrambled to his feet and came toward Gran.

"Wuz ye scared, brother?" Gran asked.

"What wuz it?" parried Sid.

"Ay, jist another busted raft! that makes two I've seed tore up to-day, an' a world uv loose logs with no brand on 'em. 'Pears like a lot uv the boys is goin' to lose their logs and winter's work. Pore fellers, I feel sorry fer 'em!"

Sid began walking slowly up and down the logs.

"I reckon ye are a little stiff," said Gran.

"Sorter," he admitted.

"Well, we'll be in the main river by mornin' and take our time. Bill an' me knows a place where they's fried eggs and ham to be had an' plenty uv grounds in the coffee, an' trees on the bank to tie up to, an' we'll stop fer breakfast."

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“Well, I don’t care a grain how soon we git thar,” said Sid, “ner to the eend uv the trip nuther,” he added.

“Air ye sorry ye come?”

“Naw, Gran, I hain’t sorry.”

They reached the “eend” on the third day and found Jimmy waiting for them.

After Bill and Gran had tied up the raft, turned it over to Jimmy, and received their trip money, Gran looked around for Sid. He found him sitting upon the wet ground, leaning on a rock, fast asleep. His clothing was besmattered with mud, both wet and dry; the water was dripping from his shoes, because his stiff and tired legs had failed him in the final landing and let him down into the water; his face was pale, and tired lines marked it older than it was.

As Gran stood, hating to wake him, a number of the men, weather-beaten and stooped, many of them looking years older than they were, and one who had a permanent limp from an accident with the logs, paused and looked with kindly interest on this little “brother” who had just made his first, never-to-be-forgotten trip down the river!

“Pore little feller!” said Bill Price.

Gran awoke him, and all set off together to take the train to the big town, where Sid was to see the world and from which Gran was to start to the West.

He spent most of the day showing Sid the town, and hunted up the owner of the watch, who seemed satisfied at regaining his property.

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The next morning, having bidden farewell to such of the men as he meant to have a farewell with, Gran was standing at the ticket office window of the "other depôt" waiting for the ticket to the place in the West which he had just asked for, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

He looked up into the eyes of Jake Singleton, the deputy sheriff.

"I've got a little paper here to sarve on ye, Gran," said the deputy.

Gran was homesick, lovesick, and sick for his mother and his friends, and quite desperate.

When the meaning of Jake Singleton's words dawned on him he turned with an ugly look and said, slowly, in a tone low and even.

"Pardner, I'd jist as soon kill one man as another, an' ef you lay a hand on me I 'low hit'll be you."

"Why, you needn't take no exceptions to me, Gran," said the sheriff pleasantly. "I don't think that little paper'll hurt ye. Jist step around here an' read hit," said Jake, putting it into his hands.

Some minutes later the leisurely agent, who had taken his own time in making out the long ticket, advanced to his window, and after looking around and waiting impatiently for some time, asked where that chap was that wanted the ticket to "Oklahomer," and if he was expecting to go this week," but no one replied.

The agent was still fuming and making futile efforts to locate the Western tourist when Gran and Jake, at the other side of town, swung onto

## *GRAN LEAVES FOR THE WEST*

the rear platform of the train just pulling out for the mountains with their friends.

“Why, Gran,” exclaimed one of them, “I thought you wuz goin’ West to git your growth.”

“I wuz tell Jake put me under arrest,” he said.

“What’s the matter, Jake?” they questioned.

“Well, he ain’t been up to no tricks hisself,” said the officer. “He’s jist wanted back up the country on a little case.”

Neither he nor Gran would say what it was, and one of the men allowed that “Gran were lookin’ so pleasin’ he didn’t believe he much minded losin’ his trip nohow.”

## XII

### TALITHA CUMI

THE "river men" had been coming back in troops for two days, tired and bedraggled, but light-hearted and merry, after the outing and a glimpse of the outside world. The women were listening with breathless eagerness to their stories of the trip and what they had seen "below."

Orlena was expecting Jimmy at any time, though one of the neighbors had stopped to tell her that Jimmy had sent word for her not to be uneasy, that he might not be back for a day or two yet, as he would not come till he got his price for the timber.

Uncle Gabriel had gotten uneasy about Sid. Some one who had come in the night before spoke of having seen him on the train, but remembered no more about him. He should have been home by this time, and the old man feared that some one had thought it a joke to stop with him at some wayside "grocery" and make him drunk. Gabriel could tell that there had been a good deal of drinking on the trip; there nearly always was. Men who never bought whiskey at other times, and scarcely ever got drunk, even at Christmas, would freely chip in with the boys

## TALITHA CUMI

and buy whiskey, upon a river trip. Many an ordinarily sober man came home from down the river quite hilarious and more than tipsy. Many a time a man would return as empty in pocket as he had gone, with nothing but his condition to show for his winter's work and several hundred dollars' worth of timber taken out.

Gabriel had come down as far as Jimmy's to inquire for Sid, but neither Jimmy nor Bill Price, in whose company the boy was to return, had come.

Orlena and Gabriel were sitting on the horse-block, guessing at the possibilities of what might have delayed them, when three persons came walking around the bend of the road.

Orlena stood up hastily and shaded her eyes; Gabriel stepped off the block, and into the middle of the road and stood a moment shading his. After a pause he said:

"Gran an' Sid!" He paused tensely and tried to go on, then chokingly, "An', an'," but he could not venture it, and Orlena, who had been straining her own eyes at the three approaching figures, said solemnly, as if she had seen a vision,

"Hit's shore to be her, Gabrel. *Hit's nobody but Almetty!*"

They did not speak again till the party came up. The young people had seen the old man and woman watching, and Almetta came on rapidly. She looked older than when she went away, taller and more mature. She put her arms around Orlena's neck and clung as if she

## ALMETTA OF GABRIEL'S RUN

would never let go; finally, reaching an arm to Uncle Gabriel, she clung to him too.

They all stood weeping until finally Orlena said quietly, "We're proud to see you back, Almetty," and she whispered brokenly, "I'm proud to be back!"

Jimmy rode in just as supper was ready. Gabriel and Sid had readily consented to take a night with them.

Orlena, who had had Lizzie Price come in a while in the mornings for help since Almetta left, soon had supper on the table, and made Almetta sit down with the men while she waited upon all.

"I know you are tired too, Almetty," she said. "Where did you git dinner to-day?"

"At Philip Gayheart's."

"At Philip Gayheart's? Why, how did you happen to be at Philip's?"

"Hit's a heap the clostest to cut acrost the hill an' come that a-way," Gran answered for her.

"Well, now, I don't know as hit's any closter much," said Jimmy. "Hit may be a leetle; but hit's a heap rougher."

"Yes, hit's a leetle the roughest," said Gran, "but hit's some closter."

Orlena asked Sid about his trip, and Jimmy boasted of the fine trade he had made with the timber, but Almetta was asked no questions until the meal was over.

After the dishes were washed and she was settled in a low chair by the side of the fireplace, with Emma Jane in her arms, they all came and



Orlena made Almetty sit down with the men  
while she waited upon all.



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sat quietly while she told them, with few interruptions, of how she went away and where she had been.

“What started you in the fust place?” asked Jimmy kindly.

“Well, I wuz a-settin’ in the crib that arternoon when Hence come to trade the watch to Gran, an’ I thought they wuz a-talkin’ uv me. Leastways I thought Hence wuz; I couldn’t hear Gran say a word, an’ I couldn’t see what they wuz a-doin’.”

“I see!” said Jimmy, and all nodded understandingly.

“Well, hit ’peared like Gran must be a-believin’ him.” She did not pause in the story, but laid her free hand on Gran’s for a moment. He would have kept it, but she drew it away. “I couldn’t stand that, so I studied on where I’d go.”

“Pore little gal!” murmured Orlena.

“An’ then I remembered pap’s oldest gal. I hadn’t thought about her in allers. She lived with her mammy’s mammy, away yander, an’ she wa’n’t never accounted in our family a-tall, though we wuz friendly when we seed her, which wuzn’t often.”

“I knowed about her too,” said Gabriel, shaking his head, “but I’d plum forgot her.”

“I remember all about her,” said Orlena, “though I had plum forgot her too. Her name wuz Nance.”

“Yes, Nance wuz her name, an’ I jist happened to remember about her. I knowed she

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had married, an' I knowed her man's name, an' I 'lowed I could find the way to her."

"Pore little young'n!" murmured Orlena.

"I wrote you a letter, Orleny, in my Fifth Reader, an' propped hit open; an' I never thought but what you'd find hit, and know I were safe, till Gran told me yesterday you hadn't. The piece uv writin' jist said that I wuz a-goin' to a good place, an' fer nobody to trouble about me. I'd give anything in reason fer you to 'a' got hit. Hit makes me sick to think uv all the trouble I been to Uncle Gabrel and all uv ye."

"Don't you worry, Sugar; that's all over now."

"Well, atter I'd writ the note an' fixed the door so Emmy could git out, I slipped away. When I come to the bars Heppy Ingold was a-settin' under the apple-tree nursin' her pop-pet; I sez to her, 'Heppy, I'm a goin' on a little trip,' sez I. 'Shall I go by the main road or by the ridge?' An' she says, 'The narrer steep road is the safest.'

"I jist tuck hit fer a sign to slip away unbeknownst, an' I clum to the top uv the ridge an' kept right up hit. I got to the head uv Prickly Ash about dark. I stopped at mammy's grave an' put some blossoms on hit, an' I stayed all night in the little house we used to live in. I knowed where we allers kept a few matches, an' I tried to make a fire; but the matches wuz dead an' wouldn't burn, an' I reckon I would 'a' froze ef I hadn't had on a whole new linsey dress. I drunk at the spring

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an' found some apples on a tree by the house; an' the next mornin' I started right on to find Nance.

"I kept out o' sight of folks; an' hit must 'a' been three o'clock, an' I jist could drag, when I come to a awful lonesome-lookin' place with great old black-lookin' spruce pines an' high, scary-lookin' clives right in the middle uv hit. Jist up from the path a ways I seed a little house under a big high tree. Hit were the sweetest-lookin' little house I ever seed to be in sich a illconvenient place.

"I thought I'd go in an' ax 'em to give me somethin' to eat an' let me stay all night. The door wuz open an' I jist walked in. Supper wuz on the table, but not a soul in sight an' not but one cheer in the house. I drug hit back f'm the table an' set down in hit. I couldn't 'a' stood another minnit ef hit had 'a' been to save my life.

"Well, in a few minutes a old gray-headed man come in with a pail o' water. He set hit down an' turned 'round an' looked at me an' never said a word.

"I said good evenin', an' he nodded his head an' p'inted fer me to set up to the table.

"I jist stared at him; an' he put his hand to his years an' his lips an' shuck his head; an' I knowed hit were the old deaf an' dumb man uv Catamount Ridge, Hiram French, an' that I wuz a long ways f'm home."

"Pore little young'n!" said Orlena again.

"I reckon I looked very ga'nt, fer when I got up an' started to the door he shuck his head

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hard an' p'inted to the table. When I stopped he dipped some water into the wash-basin and p'inted to the hand-towel an' then at the vittles on the table.

“Well, I remembered Orleny telling me onct she didn't believe he wuz crazy a-tall, an' she 'lowed he wuz a good old man. I wuz hungry as a bear an' as weak as a cat an' I 'lowed I'd resk eatin' one mess with him anyhow, so I did.

“Me an' him set down to the table, an' I thought that wuz the civilest-turned old man I ever seed; an' hit wuz shore the best mess of vittles I've et since I left home; but I moughty nigh went to sleep over hit before I wuz through. I hadn't slep' to do no good in the little house the night before.

“After supper I started to leave; but the old man shuck his head ag'in an' showed me how he'd take a quilt an' sleep on the ground under the big tree, an' how I could bolt the door an' sleep on the bed. I shuck my head an' says ‘No! no,’ but he looked so good an' kept takin' holt uv hisself an' p'intin' out under the tree an' then at the sun, to show me hit wuz goin' down; an'—well—I wuz afyeard uv Catamount Ridge wussen I wuz uv the old man cause I wuzn't afyeard uv him a-tall; an' I stayed.

“When I got up the next mornin' an' undone the door to look out, the old man wuz a-settin' on the step-block, perfect quiet, waitin' fer me to take my time, an' hit wuz away up in the day.

“He come in, an' I holp him git breakfast an' wash the dishes; an' he never said a word when I started to leave.

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“I shuck hands with him an’ looked at him hard; an’ he nodded like he knowed I wuz thankful. Then he walked a little ways out the ridge with me; an’ when he stopped I couldn’t bear to part with him that away, an’ I told him God would bless him.”

“How did you tell him, honey?” asked Orlena.

“Why, I jist turned around an’ laid one hand on his breast an’ retched t’other one straight up to Heaven, an’ sorter beckoned down toward him. He folded his arms acrost his breast an’ dropped his head, an’ I walked off; an’ I ain’t seen him sence; but I hope to meet him in heaven some day.”

Uncle Gabriel murmured “Amen,” and after a pause she resumed:

“I knowed hit couldn’t be so overly fur f’m there to where Nance an’ Joe lived; an’ I left the ridge an’ come down to the main road an’ axed at several places. When they axed me who I wuz, I told ’em my name wuz Talithy Angel.” She paused for remark, and Orlena asked,

“Well, how wuz that?”

“Well, that is my right name,” she said demurely. “My pappy named me Talithy Cumi, atter my mammy; you know she were a Angel before she married pap, an’ had that very old name.

“Pap ’lowed they had been a ‘Talithy Cumi’ amongst the Angels ever sence they crossed the waters f’m the old country an’ maybe sence the beginnin’ uv the world. He never called me

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nothin' but Talithy as long as he lived; but mammy never liked hit fer a name. She said she wuz plumb wore out with hit; an' she nick-named me 'Almetty.' Ever'body but pappy allers called me that, but hit's set down, 'Talithy Cumi' in the Bible. Betty's got hit.

"So when I got to Nance's I told her I wuz her sister Talithy, an' I ain't been called nuthin' else sence."

"I hyeard uv a gal bein' in that neighborhood by that name; but I never knowed hit wuz you," said Gabriel sadly.

"You shore lost yourself right then," said Jimmy.

"Yes, hit wuz me," she said simply, "but we didn't stay there long atter I come. Joe had a brother livin' down on the railroad, an' he had been a-wantin' to go down there for a long time, so we all moved in about a month a'ter I went to live with 'em.

"Nance an' Joe wuz very good to me. They didn't know I'd ever left Betty's; an' they thought I'd come from there; an' I never told 'em no better till yesterday.

"When we moved away to the railroad I wore a old black sunbonnet an' a big black apern uv Nance's. We went in a waggin with oxens tell we got to the railroad, an' then we rid in the kyars about twenty miles. When we went in the kyars we set down in the fust seat we come to an' never moved tell we got off.

"When the feller with the stiff-brim hat went to help me off'n the train he says, 'Be kereful there, old lady; you might fall.'

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"I jist tuck off that old bonnet an' sez, 'Air ye speakin' to me, Mister?'"

"He whistled, sorter low, an' sez, 'I reckon not,' an' he grabbed that little step-block an' clum up them steps a-dyin' laughin', an' I had the fust good laugh I'd had sence I left home."

The smiles that greeted this were very near to tears, and again Orlena murmured, "Pore little young'n!"

"There wuz three or four houses at 'Deep Ford,' the place where we got off at. We stayed with Joe's brother tell Joe could find a house an' a job. About Christmas we moved into a house with the railroad on one side an' the river on t'other, an' I watched fer somebody I knowed all winter; but I never seed a soul tell Jake Singleton an' another feller tied up their raft there, t'other evenin', an' spent the night with us."

"Did Jake spend the night thar?" asked Jimmy with great interest.

"Yes, an' he set an' told us a heap uv news about folks up an' down the river; an' he told about servin' a warrant on Gran fer the watch; an' he told us how Gran come to him jist before he went off an' he told about Hence comin' that day an' sellin' the watch to him an' how he bragged on her. He said Gran wanted to know who she belonged to so'st he could take her back before he went West. Then I knowed hit were the watch an' not me they were talkin' about that day in the barnyard.

"I axed Jake ef he 'lowed he would see Gran

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down below anywheres; an' he 'lowed he mought, apt as not; an' I fixed up a little piece uv writin' an' told Jake to give hit to Gran ef he could find him."

"He come in a pea uv not findin' me," said Gran gravely.

"Where did he find you, brother?" asked Jimmy.

"I wuz at t'other station with a ticket fer the place in Oklahomy pretty nigh bought, when Jake come in; an' we had to about what you mought call 'fly' to catch the kyars comin' home. Sid wuz on the train, an' I whispered to him when I had a chanct an' told him not to say nothin', an' me an' him slipped off at Deep Ford an' found Almetty."

"Well, the Lord be praised!" said Gabriel. "I reckon I never would 'a' found 'er."

"Wuz that day before yesterday?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes; me an' Sid stayed all night with 'em, an' yesterday mornin' Joe an' Nance an' us all come on to 'town' together on the mornin' train an' knocked about a little."

"What become uv Joe an' Nance?"

"Why, they went on back home on the afternoon train, an' me an' Almetty an' Sid cotch a wagin an' come on as fur as the mouth uv Haley's Branch an' stayed all night at John Bentley's, an' this mornin' we come on walkin'."

"Well, we are moughty glad an' thankful to have you all back," said Orlena fervently, and all made assent.

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“They ain’t no place like Gabriel’s Run,” said Almetta, “an’ I’ve tried several.”

The little group had suffered so much over the same sorrows and been drawn so closely together by the same ties, that now that they were reunited they spoke very frankly, and it did not seem out of place when Jimmy asked,

“I reckon, Gran, maybe you’ll be a wantin’ the little house in the Green Holler after all?”

“Yes, I reckon so,” said Gran.

“Air ye aimin’ to talk to him now, honey?” asked Orlena softly.

“We’ve a’ready talked,” she said.

Jimmy looked into the fire with a calculating squint.

“Ye say Nance an’ Joe come to town with ye, yesterday?”

“Yes, they come with us.”

“Well, ef they’s goin’ to be a weddin’, yesterday would ’a’ been a good time to a got a pair uv license, wouldn’t hit?”

“I reckin hit would,” said Gran, with a quiet smile at Almetta, who was blushing and pretending to hold her hand between her face and the fire. There was another pause, during which Jimmy gently poked the fore-stick, sending up great showers of sparks. He was apparently lost in thought, but finally ventured,

“Maybe that wuz a sort uv a infair<sup>1</sup> dinner ye et at Philip’s to-day?”

“Hit mought ’a’ been,” said Gran, smiling.

“I jist ’lowed hit were,” chuckled Jimmy.

<sup>1</sup> Wedding.

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“An’ I’m proud uv hit!” said Gabriel Angel earnestly.

“I ’lowed they’d never git hit told,” said Sid.

“Orleny,” said Almetta, looking earnestly into the woman’s face, “do you hate hit? I’m turned into sixteen now.”

“No, honey, I’m well satisfied ef you air.”

“I’m satisfied,” she said. “I’ve raily been likin’ Gran ever sence last summer when he made me make the tater hills right. An’ now we’ll live an’ die on Gabriel’s Run.”









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